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THE
RĀMĀYANA OF VĀLMĪKI

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A SUMMARY

BY

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PREFACE

IN the preparation of this summary of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyana* two English translations have been made use of—the works of Mr. T. H. Griffith and Mr. Manmatha Nath Dutt. The former is in verse, and yet despite the fact that it must adhere to the laws of metre, it is a wonderfully accurate version of the original poem. But for those who wish to study the *Rāmāyana* with special care the scrupulous accuracy of Mr. Dutt's translation will no doubt be preferred. This summary has omitted much that is redundant and prolix, especially in the sixth book, and in the Uttara Kānda. But it is hoped that nothing of real value or essential to the understanding of the poem has been ignored.

J. M. MACFIE.

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Note on the Pronunciation of Indian words

Short *a* has the sound of *a* in rural, or of *u* in lull.

Long *a* has the sound of *a* in father, and tar.

Short *i* has the sound of *i* in fill.

Long *i* has the sound of *i* in police, or of *ee* in feed.

As the book is for the benefit of the general reader, no distinctio has been made between the palatal and lingual sibilants, or betwee lingual and dental *t* and *d*. It should also be noted that *th* and *d* are the aspirates of *t* and *d* and have no equivalents in Englis Similarly *bh* and *ph* are the aspirates of *b* and *p*.

Short *a* in an open syllable and consequently at the end of word is not sounded in Hindi, e.g. Bala-rāma is pronounced Bulrām, Rāmāyana as Rāmāyun.

CONTENTS

Books		Page
	Introduction	1
I.	Childhood and youth	19
II.	Ayodhya	61
III.	The Forest	135
IV.	Kishkindha....	169
V.	The Beautiful	197
VI.	Lanka	228
VII.	The Last Book	281

Appendices

i.	Description of Ayodhyā	324
ii.	The Greatness of Kings	326
iii.	Prayers in the Rāmāyana	327
iv.	Rāma's Hymn to the Sun	329
v.	Sītā's Appeal	331
vi.	Brahmā's hymn in praise of Rāma	333
vii.	Rāvana's earlier history	335

Notes

1.	The authorship and date of the poem	343
2.	Nārada	345
3.	The Thirty-three Gods	345
4.	The Prajāpatis and the work of Creation	346
5.	Dasharatha's Ministers	349
6.	The Materialists of Ancient India	350
7.	The Sacrifice of Daksha	352
8.	The demon Rāhu	354
9.	Rāma's ancestry	355
10.	The four ages	356

NOTES—*contd.* Page

11.	OM, Gayatri, Vashatkara and Yoga	357
12.	Destiny *versus* Human effort	358
13.	Hanumān	352
14.	The demons	360
15.	Gandharvas and Apsarasas	361
16.	The Vedas	361
17.	The Māhābharata on Rāma	363
18.	The Rāmāyana of Tulsidas	366
19.	The immorality of the gods	399
20.	Vishnu and his descents	371
	Bibliography	372
	Index	374

INTRODUCTION

The name of Rāma, prince of Ayodhyā, is known throughout the length and breadth of India. The story of his exile, and of his wife, Sītā's captivity, has been told in every language of the civilized world. And it is only natural that it should be so. Because it tells of a youth, born to the highest dignity and power among the royal houses of India, submitting meekly to the cruel sentence of his father, spending years of exile in the forest, refusing to think or speak harshly of those who had wronged him, manifesting the most sincere affection for, and entire absence of envy towards the brother who was to have supplanted him, full of the most pure-hearted love for his wife, steadfast to what he believed to be his duty, immovable in his devotion to truth and righteousness, and always treating with reverence the religion which his age practiced. That is the story of Rāma which is known and read everywhere. And it may be that such was the brief and touching tale, which wandering rhapsodists first told to listening audiences many centuries ago; probably not very different from the summary given by the *rishi* Nārada in the opening cantos of the poem. But that is not the story of Rāma as we have it in the book which bears Vālmīki's name. Beginning as a comparatively brief narration of heroic deeds, it has gathered to itself an amazing mass of myth and legend. It records the most wonderful acts performed by Rāma, his friends and enemies, most of them either monkeys or demons. And it adds, what we hope was not an original part of the poem and what must be considered a most serious blot on the character of the hero, the statement, namely, that after he had rescued Sītā from the hands of her captors and obtained, by a most cruel test, the most convincing proofs of her innocence, he yielded

The origin of the poem

to the clamour of idle tongues and sent her back to the forest. The poem, then, as we have it to-day while Rāma is still its central figure, is very different from what it must have been in its first beginnings. Like the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyana* has grown with the passing of the centuries, and those most competent to form a judgement are not agreed as to when it finally assumed the form and size it has to-day. Tradition has always associated it with the name of Vālmīki. He was a hermit and, according to the poem, a contemporary of Rāma. During his years of exile the prince visited him in his hermitage, and when Sitā, after the return to Ayodhyā, was expelled from her husband's palace, it was in Vālmīki's hermitage that she found refuge, and where she gave birth to her twin children. It was to these two boys that Vālmīki taught his poem when he had composed it, and it was they who first recited the glorious narrative of his great achievements to a father who was as ignorant as they of the ties that bound them. On the very threshold of the poem the claim is made that Vālmīki was verbally inspired in the preparation of his work by the god Brahmā, who came in person and promised that it would not contain a single falsehood. And as is the case with others of India's sacred books, all sorts of blessings are assured to those who read it or hear it read either in whole or in part.

Vishnu takes birth in Rama and his brothers

Rāma's sufferings, however, were not the sufferings of a common mortal. They were events planned beforehand in the council chamber of heaven, and leading up to a great victory for the gods against the power of a wicked demon. Rāma was the son of Dasharatha, king of Ayodhyā, but he was also an incarnation of the god, Vishnu, and his descent to earth was a part of the divine plan in achieving the overthrow of Rāvana a ten-headed Rākshasa whose capital was in Ceylon. A graphic description is given in the first book of a meeting held in heaven, presided

over by Brahmā, the creator god. It was the fatal practice of that kindly disposed deity to grant boons before he knew what his suppliant desired, and Rāvana had received from Brahmā, in reward for long years of asceticism, the promise that he should never be killed by either god or demon. Once granted immunity, Rāvana had begun a relentless war against the celestials, and steps had to be taken to over-reach him. Rāvana, in his pride, had never thought of asking immunity against the assaults of beasts or men, and it was proposed that Vishnu should assume the form of a man, and as a man, wage war with Rāvana. Vishnu agreed to this proposal and his divine essence took birth in the four sons born to king Dasharatha, Rāma receiving more than a double portion of the divine qualities.[1] There was however, a condition attached to Vishnu's consent. And it was that the gods and other inhabitants of heaven should become the fathers of great swarms of gigantic bears and monkeys, who would act as helpers in Rāma's campaign against the common foe. This is an element of the first importance. Vishnu was here playing no unusual part. He had already appeared as an *avatāra* in the person of Krishna, prince of Dwāraka, as Parasurāma, the son of the Brāhmin Jamadagni, as a boar, as a fish, as a man-lion, and as a dwarf to render help in times of difficulty and danger.[2] And grotesque though some of those representations of Vishnu may appear to be, the student

[1] The manner of the birth was as follows: When Dasharatha was celebrating the horse sacrifice performed for the purpose of procuring offspring, Vishnu rose out of the flames. He bore in his hand a golden vessel with a silver cover, full of Pāyasa, a 'preparation of milk, rice and sugar.' Handing it to the king, the god bade him give it to his queens. Kausalyā drank half of it with the result that she gave birth to Rāma, the *one half of Vishnu*. The second queen drank half of what remained, and her son Bharata was *the very fourth of Vishnu*. The third queen drank the rest, and gave birth to twin sons, Lakshmana and Shatrugna. It is said that they also were endowed with half of Vishnu. But the arithmetic is here at fault, and it is usually said that they each possessed one-eighth of Vishnu. See Dutt's Translation, pp. 44. 49.

[2] His incarnation as Krishna may have been of later date, but there is a reference to Krishna in the sixth book of the poem. The recognition of Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu was not then thought of.

of religion must recognize that, in doing as he did, Vishnu was acting his part as the preserver-god. All through we shall find that the poet remembers that this is the motive of the poem. And from time to time we find the gods looking on with great interest from heaven, or seated in their aerial cars witnessing the exploits of the hero and expressing their joy at his success. Garlands fall from the sky and the drums of heaven begin to beat. A specially striking illustration of this is to be found near the close of the third book. When Sītā was carried off by Rāvana, the voice of Brahmā was heard declaring in solemn accents that the deed decreed of old had been accomplished. By that he meant that the capture of Sītā was a link in the chain of circumstances which would inevitably lead Rāma and his monkey friends to attack and overthrow the enemy of the gods. And not long after, when Sītā was pining in captivity, Indra, the king of the celestials, was invited by Brahmā to go to Ceylon and by his presence and words of comfort assure Sītā of a happy issue out of all her troubles.

The gods of the Ramayana

Apart however from incidents like these, the gods do not appear to any great extent in the development of Rāma's exploits. Shiva, for instance, who with Brahmā and Vishnu is a member of the Hindu Triad, is seldom mentioned though we are told a few incidents in connexion with his career, in various parts of the poem. Thus we come across a number of references to the sacrifice of Daksha, which Shiva brought to so sudden and unceremonious a conclusion. The story itself is not given in detail, but the frequency of the references shows that it must have made a big impression on the mind of antiquity. In what might be called the mythological section of the poem, and by that we mean the large section of Book I in which Vishvāmitra entertains the two boys, Rāma and Lakshmana, with a great variety of legendary tales, Shiva occupies a prominent place. In connexion with both him and Indra stories are told

that must be considered most unsuitable for any one to listen to, and especially for lads in their teens. Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva are recognized as the chief gods of the Hindu Pantheon, but Indra is manifestly of first importance among the secondary deities. Indeed he is in some ways, at least apart from Vishnu in view of his being incarnate in Rāma, the most prominent of all the gods mentioned in the poem, both as to the legends in which he plays a leading part, and because of the share he takes in the events of Rāma's history. It is he who intervenes when the presumption of demons or ascetics seems to threaten the power of the immortals. It is he who remonstrates with Vishvāmitra when that ambitious monarch aspires to the dignity of Brāhminhood. It is he who sends the nymphs of heaven to bring about his downfall. But it is Indra also who rewards the piety of Sharabhanga by coming to his hermitage and carrying him off to heaven, and it is he, as we have seen, who comforts Sītā in her loneliness. We read of a great many other deities, Vāyu, the god of the wind, Agni, the god of fire, Varuna, the god of the firmament, Kuvera, the god of wealth, Yama, the god of the dead, Kāma, the god of love, of the Ashvins, the Adityas, the Maruts, and the Vasus, all of them, with many others, deities, belonging to the period of the Vedas and Brāhmanas. But it is by way of vague reference only.[1] And when their names are mentioned, it is in connexion with some event, such as that Rāvana stole and made use of an air chariot that had formerly been the property of the god Kuvera.

The worship of the gods

It is the same with the worship of the gods and the performance of sacrifice and ritual. With the exception of the horse-sacrifice, which was offered by king Dasharatha, and is described with considerable detail, the poet either had no interest in describing them, or he assumed that his readers were acquainted with

[1] To this statement there is the striking exception where Agastya teaches Rāma a hymn of praise, to be addressed to Sūrya, the Sun-god.

the ritual. He contents himself with saying that a sacrifice was celebrated with due rites or that the worshipper went through his ceremony with the help of spells from the *Atharva Veda.* As to the daily ritual we get such glimpses as these. Speaking of Ayodhyā and the character of its inhabitants, we read that there was no one who did not light the sacrificial fire, or did not perform the usual sacrifice. Of Rāma and Sītā it is said that they spent the night prior to the intended coronation in fasting and prayer. It was to Vishnu, under his name of Nārāyana, that Rāma on this occasion turned his thoughts and offered an oblation of clarified butter on the sacred fire. When they set out for the forest and were about to enter the boat that was to carry them across the Ganges, it is said that the prince 'recited mantras (texts from the Vedas) fit to be recited by Kshatriyas and Brāhmins' 'while Lakshmana sipping water from the river, as laid down in the scriptures, bowed down to it, along with Sītā, in gladness of heart.' Again, when they were in midstream, Sītā addressed to the river a prayer which well deserves being quoted in full: 'O Ganga, protected by thee, may the son of the intelligent and mighty monarch, Dasharatha, execute the mandate of the latter. Having spent complete fourteen years in the forest he will return in company with his brother and myself. Then, O, worshipful one, O thou of auspicious fortune, having returned safely I will, O Ganga, worship thee, thou that crownest every desire. O thou that wendst in three ways, O revered one, thou envelopest the regions of Brahmā. Thou appearest in this world as the spouse of the Ocean-king, I will, O respected one, bow down unto thee. O, beauteous one, I will hymn thee, when, with good fortune returned, the foremost of men has obtained the kingdom. I will, to please thee, give away unto Brāhmins hundreds and thousands of kine, cloths, sapid rice and vessels of wine by thousands, and pillaus (meat and rice). O, worshipful one, I will worship thee, on Rāma having returned to the city. And I will worship all the gods

that dwell on thy banks, as well as the holy spots and fanes, as soon as, O, sinless one, that mighty armed one without sin, will, coming back from his abode in the forest, enter Ayodhyā, in company with his brother and myself.'[1] This is one of the few prayers to be found in the poem. As in the case of the ritual of sacrifice it is considered enough to state that the worshipper prayed to or meditated upon a particular deity. For example, we read over and over again that the exiles performed their morning or their evening devotions. The ritual was doubtless similar to what is prescribed in the laws of Manu where single words and sacred syllables are believed to contain miraculous power.[2]

In the sixth book of the poem, when the fight with Rāma was at its hottest, we are told that the *rishi* Agastya appeared on the scene and taught Rāma a hymn of praise, in honour of the Sun, which was certain to secure victory against the foe. In this hymn, which the reader will find quoted in the appendix, it is declared that the Sun-god is Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva; that he is Indra and Yama, the god of war and the god of wealth; that he is Varuna and the Moon, the spirits of the dead, Manu, and a great many other deities, the source and parent of all things; and that the person who worships the Sun will never suffer from any misfortune. This address to the Sun is practically the same in form and purpose as the hymn of congratulation which the god Brahmā addressed to Rāma when Rāvana had been overcome. It declared that Rāma was the god Vishnu, with of course a great many other deities included in him as well. This hymn is of the very greatest interest to the reader from the fact that when the god began to

[1] This prayer is quoted from Mr. N. M. Dutt's translation of the *Rāmāyana*, p. 338.

[2] If a Brāhmin repeat the sacred syllable OM, the three words, Bhūr, Bhuvah, Svar, and the Gāyatri, both morning and evening, he acquires as much religious merit as if he had recited the whole Vedas . . . an offering of muttered prayers is ten times more efficacious than a Vedic sacrifice, a prayer that is inaudible to others is a hundred times more efficacious, but a mental recitation is a thousand times more powerful. See *The Laws of Manu* (A Summary in English) p. 29.

address Rāma in this strain, he was surprised and said; 'As I take myself to be a man of the name of Rāma, and son of Dasharatha, therefore, sir, please tell me who I am and whence I have come?'[1] All through the poem the reader will observe that Rāma consistently acts and speaks as a human being, and never on any occasion betrays the suggestion that he is anything more. This is specially noteworthy in his outburst of anger at the loss of Sītā, when he declares that if the gods do not restore Sītā to him within twenty-four hours, he will wage war against the inhabitants of heaven, earth and hell, and bring the universe to an untimely end. The hero is, of course, conscious of possessing wonderful powers and energy, but both demons and ascetics are similarly endowed. He is as ignorant of the future as his neighbours, as anxious as to what is in store for him; and as persuaded that Fate is too strong to be overcome.[1]

The power of Karma or Destiny

The doctrine that Fate or Destiny—one prefers to use the Sanskrit word *Karma*—controls all things, is, as we should expect, frequently referred to in a poem whose leading characters are called on to endure so much undeserved suffering. The hero often lost heart, especially after Sītā was carried off, and Lakshmana had to perform the role of comforter. Like others, before and after him, he argued for patience by dwelling on the fact that no one could escape sorrow. Even the gods had to bend before Fate's inexorable law. It is often spoken of as relentless and cruel; as a power greater than the gods; as a *something* that no one could resist. When the characters in the poem speak in this way, they are thinking of destiny in what one may call the ordinary way. But the deeper view is also expressed, and here a belief in the doctrine of transmigration is of course

[1] The strange combat between Rāma and Parashurāma or Rāma of the axe, another incarnation of Vishnu, must not be forgotten. There Parashurāma tells Rāma that he knows him to be chief of the celestials. And this incident occurs in the first book (i. 76). It is also said that the whole company of the gods, with Brahmā at their head, came to witness the contest.

involved, that men reap what they have sown, either in the previous years of their present existence, or during a former life. And it is more than once said that when the gods have exhausted their stock of accumulated merit, even they come tumbling down from heaven to renew their lives on a lower plane. However unsatisfactory it may appear from other points of view, this theory helps to explain the inequalities of life. A man, or a god, enjoys what he has or is, because in a previous existence he has lived a good life, performed austerities and acquired merit. Our *Karma* is what we have to our credit or to our discredit. If we add to it, we shall rise in the scale of existence. If we take away from it, we must descend If misfortune befall us, it is because we are reaping the fruit of our own evil acts, even as happiness and prosperity flow from our good Karma. Dasharatha, for instance, gives expression to this deeper view. He rails at fate, even as others do, as a something outside of himself, entirely arbitrary and unreasonable in its actions and effect. But he also searches his heart and comes to the conclusion that he must be suffering the punishment or fruit of a sin committed in the past. And he finds it in the fact that he had deprived cows of their calves and taken the lives of many creatures.

Fate and Free Will

When the news reached Lakshmana that Rāma must go into exile, he was not so ready to yield to the sentence as his brother was. Rāma dwelt in the usual way on the fact that Fate was lord of all. He even went the length of denying the doctrine of free-will, saying that when Kaikeyi plotted against him she was not to blame. It was destiny which impelled her to act as she had done. Its workings were beyond human understanding and no one could avoid or disobey its decrees. Kaikeyi was a lady of high birth and good character, and yet all at once she had begun to act like a base-born woman.

E'en saints, inspired with rigid zeal,
When once the stroke of Fate they feel,
In sternest vows no more engage,
And fall enslaved by love and rage.[1]

Fate was the primal cause of man's happiness and misery, his loss and gain, his birth and death. Lakshmana, however, refused to accept this solution of the problem with the calmness which his brother displayed, and he replied in very passionate language that he would defy destiny. Rāma was using the argument of a coward. Brave men fought with destiny and overcame it. And the people of Ayodhyā would discover, if they had never discovered it before, that human effort was stronger than fate.[1]

But Lakshmana had a better argument to employ than these impulsive outbursts against destiny. And in a later canto of the poem (ii. 58) while Rāma continues to adhere to the more common view, Lakshmana declares that, even if what has happened is in harmony with the will of the Creator, their father has been guilty of an unrighteous act, and the banishment of Rāma will bring upon the king woe here and hereafter. In such an utterance we see the clash of accepted religious conceptions with the teachings of morality—the mind of man in revolt against what it imagines to be the will of God. In connexion with this whole subject, however, one realizes that, unlike the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyana* is as a rule content to accept things as they are, and to make the best of them. One must suppose that Rāma is intended to represent the more popular view of destiny in relation to the actions of men. But the fact that other views are placed in the mouth of Lakshmana shows that some at least were persuaded that it was fatal to moral and spiritual progress if they explained a present misfortune, or apologized for a present sin by calling in a past, over which, as conscious personalities, they had no

1 Griffith's translation, ii. 22. pp. 120.

2 This is almost the only passage in the poem where the relative strength of fate and human effort are contrasted. In the *Mahābhārata* many passages emphasize the necessity for human effort.

control. And in particular that what is morally wrong can never be included among the purposes of God.

Asceticism

The conviction that a man, a demon or a god, was able to accumulate a store of merit which would achieve an alteration for the better in his future existence led to a firm belief in the value of asceticism. Among the mass of the people the conviction happily prevailed that the honourable life of the householder, the practice of kindness to man and beast, of truth and righteousness, were duties that could not be ignored. But unfortunately the emphasis laid on asceticism shows that the performance of austerities was reckoned the best of all methods for winning heaven, and this only too often to the exclusion of ordinary everyday virtue. According to the poem the great stretch of country from Chitrakuta to the banks of the Godāvari was a dense forest in which great multitudes of hermits and ascetics passed their days. Rāma spent ten years of his exile in moving from one hermitage to another. Some of the ascetics lived on roots which they laboriously dug out of the earth; others lived on leaves, on air, and on the rays of the moon. Those who used grain either ate the seeds whole or bruised them with stones. Some slept on the cold ground, others made the running streams their bed. There were those who sat between the five fires, in contrast to those who stood wrapped in garments dripping wet. But austerities such as these are as nothing compared with what Vishvamitra endured, standing, as he did on one leg for a thousand years and neither eating nor drinking all that time. In early life Vishvāmitra was a king, but an encounter which he had with the *rishi*, Vasishtha, showed him that the power of Brāhmins was infinitely greater than the power of kings, and he resolved that he would compel the gods to make him a Brāhmin. He was told that he was seeking the impossible, but he achieved it at last. The gods did everything to thwart him. They provoked him to anger. They sent heavenly nymphs, to whose charms he fell a victim

and thereby robbed him of the merit he had won. Vishvāmitra's power was shown on another occasion, when he raised king Trishanku half way to the skies. The saint on this occasion was so angry with the celestials that he created a number of new stars, and was on the point of creating new gods, when the deities agreed to a compromise and thus placated the angry saint. There was another saint called Mandakarni, who lived on air for ten thousand years. The gods, with Agni at their head, were greatly alarmed, being persuaded that the hermit wished to share their power and dignity, and they sent five celestial concubines to lead him from the paths of virtue. They were entirely successful. The saint had no further desire to go to heaven. He was contented with the earth. But he had so much ascetic merit left that he was able to build a palace beneath the waters of a lake, where he and his female companions continued to dwell. The most humiliating of these legends dealing with asceticism is one in which Indra was again involved. This god seduced Ahalyā, the wife of Gautama, an eminent ascetic. The saint was naturally very angry and cursed the god for his foul deed, with the result that he became a eunuch. The discomfited deity was very much distressed and appealed to his fellow celestials to help him. He thought that he gave a sufficient explanation for his sin, by saying that he had rendered them a service. He had provoked the anger of the saint, and thereby caused him to lose some of the religious merit he had so laboriously acquired.

Asceticism and Morals

That there was something in asceticism itself, which compelled the gods to yield reluctantly what the devotee was striving to obtain, is shown very markedly in the story of Rāvana. The one desire of this evil-minded Rākshasa was to overcome the gods in battle. He and his followers too persecuted the hermits and ascetics who dwelt in the forests. When they had killed them, they ate their flesh. Rāvana was

not seeking absorption in Brahma. He had no desire to walk in the paths of righteousness. But he practiced austerities which lasted ten thousand years, and at the end of every thousand years cast one of his ten heads into the sacrificial fire.[1] This amazing penance compelled Brahmā to grant the boon he craved, and rendered necessary Vishnu's incarnation in Rāma. It must, however, be gladly recognized that there was another class of ascetics who strove earnestly for the attainment of self-control, and in the practice of Yoga devoted themselves to meditation and prayer. In the account given of Sharabhanga and Sutikshna, two eminent hermits, there is no manifestation of jealousy on the part of the gods. Indeed we read with regard to both of these individuals that Indra himself came to summon them to heaven. Sharabhanga's translation was very remarkable. He entered a fire which he himself had lighted. His body was consumed, but out of the flames there emerged a radiant youth clothed in beautiful garments who rose quickly into the air and passed into the presence of Brahmā, where he was welcomed by the celestials. Sharabhanga offered Rāma a share of the merit he had acquired and a place beside him in heaven, but the hero declined the offer, saying that he 'would acquire all these regions,' by his own endeavour.

Moral Teaching

When we turn to consider the moral teaching of the poem, we find ourselves in a different world. We read of men and women who sought to do their duty, who realized the obligations of truth and righteousness, who insisted on the wickedness of falsehood and deceit, pride and anger. Kindness to man and beast is over and over again inculcated. And it is recognized that adultery is the greatest of all sins. It was not without reason that the Vedas declared that the life of the householder was the truest renunciation. Because it is only in the home and in contact with his

[1] It is said of the god Indra that he obtained the rank he enjoyed as king of the celestials as the result of performing one hundred horse sacrifices.

fellows, that a man can win his soul. And it is with gratitude that one recalls such teaching and finds it practiced in every day life. But the insistent question demands an answer. When will the people of India purge their sacred books of a mythology which dishonours God, which darkens and defiles the mind of its readers, and which hinders them from making progress in moral and spiritual attainment. We have already referred to the character of the hero. But his wife deserves to stand by his side. If we deduct those statements—the stock in trade of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Laws of Manu*—that a woman's husband is her god, we recognize with admiration her devotion to duty, her affection for her husband, and also the gentle frankness with which on occasion she expressed her opinion in opposition to his. But her strong and noble nature is best revealed when, in response to the unjust suspicions of Rāma and his subjects, she faces the test of the burning fire and seeks refuge in the earth, which opens to receive her. There is no cloistered virtue in Sitā's life. She is far removed from the evils of the *purda* system and the degradations of polygamy. She lived a free life in the forest, the single wife of a husband who loved her and held her in reverence. And with these advantages we see to what heights a woman could attain more than two thousand years ago in India.

The position of Women

Unfortunately in its references to women the poem does not always maintain this high level. There is perhaps no single duty more frequently insisted on than that a woman must look upon her husband as her only deity, while the promise is held out that if she is obedient and faithful, she will continue to be his wife in the world to come. And she is told that she must love him with unalterable affection, no matter how bad he is. It was Anasūyā, the wife of Atri, who gave expression to this opinion, but that aged lady had apparently been horrified by some women, dead to all sense of decency, who lorded it over their husbands

and 'made those who should command obey' (ii. 117). Over and over again it is said that women are 'by nature crooked, fickle, devoid of religious knowledge,' a cause of strife between fathers and sons (iii. 46). In days of prosperity they are faithful to their husbands, in adversity and sorrow they forsake them; as unstable as lightning, as quick as the wind in doing wrong (iii. 13). But if they wish to be saved from heartlessness and unchastity, the only cure is to look up to their husbands who alone can secure their spiritual welfare (ii. 39). That women enjoyed a very considerable amount of freedom is plain from a variety of passages describing the condition of Ayodhyā. They thronged the roofs and streets of Ayodhyā as Rāma passed through. On the other hand, we are told that when Sitā passed through the same streets on her way to exile the startled citizens in sorrow and wonder realized that she whom formerly even the rangers of the sky could not see was seen by every passer-by (ii. 33). One of the proofs that the *Rāmāyana* is, in its origins, an older book than the *Mahābhārata* is found in the fact that no case of Satī is recorded. Royal widows talk of casting themselves upon the funeral pyre, so overwhelming is their grief. But neither of Dasharatha's three queens, nor any of his three hundred and fifty other wives attempted to do so. And it is nowhere laid down as a duty to be performed or as a privilege that women could enjoy. Rāma's mother, Kausalyā, and the other queens all lived to welcome him back to his capital when the years of exile were over.

Social Conditions

In view of the fact that so much of Rāma's life was spent in the forest, or in fighting the demons of Ceylon, we get comparatively little opportunity of making ourselves acquainted with the social conditions of the people. The second book does however lift the curtain a little when it describes the people's joy at the prospect of Rāma's coronation, and their distress at his exile. In these passages we get some details of a most interesting kind. But we have to recognize that the spirit of

exaggeration is present there also, as in other parts of the poem. For it is quite manifest that we are not reading the sober pages of veracious history when it is recorded of Ayodhyā that it was built by Manu, the founder of Rāma's race and the secondary creator of the present universe, that Dasharatha was 9000 years old—one version says, 60,000 years—when Rāma was born, and that the inhabitants of the city all lived to see their sons and grandsons, were never afflicted by any kind of illness, and had wives, every one of whom was endowed with grace and beauty. That lofty ideals of government were already recognized is seen in the statements that it was a king's duty to treat all classes on terms of equality, and that, in administering punishment, a judge should look upon the culprit as if he were his own son. The ministers of king Dasharatha were almost all Brāhmins, men of great age and wisdom. But in connexion with the proposed installation of Rāma, he summoned princes and nobles from all parts of the empire, and, in addition, appears to have secured some sort of public approval in a general assembly attended by members of the twice-born castes. On the other hand, we find Rāma saying that while it is a king's business to protect his people from calamity and to ease their burdens (i. 46) his commands should be obeyed with alacrity, and he himself never be thwarted in anything he wishes to do (ii. 52). That this was a settled opinion is shown in the fact that he absolutely refused to listen to Lakshmana when he proposed that they should ignore their father's decree, and take possession of the throne. There is a long passage (ii. 67) in which one of Dasharatha's ministers dwells on the miseries which befall a country where there is no king. Anarchy is sure to prevail. The rites of religion are ignored. Wives disobey their husbands. Drought afflicts the land; men cannot sleep with open doors. Joy and gladness flee away; people prey upon and devour one another. And a monarch is compared to the eye in the human body; the fountain of truth and religion,

he surpasses the gods, Varuna and Yama. Without his protecting hand darkness would overspread the earth and men cease to distinguish between right and wrong.

The four castes

The four castes are frequently referred to. They are the Brāhmins or priests, the Kshatriyas or warriors, the Vaishyas or traders and agriculturists, and the Shūdras or servile class. There is no doubt that the Brāhmin stood at their head. It is made quite plain that it is the duty of the Kshatriya even to obey the Brāhmin (i.6). But there is not such emphasis laid on this pre-eminence as we find in other sacred books. It is true that when king Dasharatha celebrated the horse-sacrifice he asked the officiating priests to accept his whole empire, in acknowledgement of their greatness. But he doubtless knew that they would refuse the offer, on the ground that they were not fit to rule. They asked instead for ten million cows and one hundred million pieces of gold (i.14). It is only fair to add that in another passage it is said that Brāhmins received gifts *with discrimination*, and that they were in the habit of giving away in charity. As to the rest of the people a list of trades given in the second book includes a large proportion of luxury occupations, which betokens an advanced civilisation. We read of workers in ivory, gems and glass; of goldsmiths and physicians; of shampooers, and men who prepared warm baths; of male and female actors; of courtesans and liquor merchants. How these and other occupations were distributed among the *four castes* we are not told. It was the Shūdras' business to serve the other three. But there was manifestly already a great mixture of castes; and it is quite plainly said that the king had wives belonging to the Vaishya and Shūdra castes, as well as to his own. This was recognized as perfectly proper in the days of the Epic, as the reader of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Laws of Manu* is well aware. Such a practice is, of course, not tolerated

at the present day. And were further argument necessary to show that the laws of caste have grown more stringent, we would point to the invitation which the Shūdras received to be present at Dasharatha's sacrifice, and to Rāma's treatment of Guha. That individual was king of the Nishādas, a jungle tribe of aboriginal out-castes, yet we find the prince taking to his arms a man who to-day would be reckoned as an untouchable, and accepting the food which he set before him.

The Ramayana

BOOK I

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Narada's summary

Some years after Rāma had returned from exile and the conquest of Rāvana, Vālmīki [1] the hermit saint asked the rishi Nārada [2] if there was any one on earth with virtue, heroism and truth, faithful to his vows and kind to all creatures, free from envy and anger, from whose presence in battle the gods fled away in fear, able to govern the three worlds, equal in power and majesty to the gods, Vishnu and Indra, Agni and Vāyu. To this question Nārada replied that there was one, and one only, in whom all these powers and virtues dwelt, and that he was Rāma—Rāma as steadfast as the Himālayas, as patient as the earth, as bountiful as the god of wealth, as unfathomable as the ocean, the very incarnation of justice, one whom good men followed as rivers follow the sea. Nārada then briefly related the story of Rāma. His father Dasharatha, realizing the advances of old age, resolved to share the burden of his kingdom with this his eldest and best-beloved son. But Kaikeyi, the youngest of Dasharatha's three queens, filled with envy, claimed the fulfilment of two boons which the king had bidden her ask some years before. When told to state her boons, the queen demanded that Rāma should be sent an exile to the forest, and that her own son, Bharata, should succeed to the throne. The king could not break his plighted word, and Rāma at once obeying his father's command went into exile accompanied by his wife Sitā, and another brother

1 Vālmīki, see note 1.

2 Nārada, see note 2.

called Lakshmana. After wandering through many woods and forests, the exiles built a hut in the hill Chitrakūta, and made for themselves garments of deerskin and the bark of trees. Inconsolable at the loss of his son, king Dasharatha very soon after died, but Bharata refused to assume the sovereignty. He followed his brother to the woods and pleaded with him to return. Rāma however said he must obey his father's commands. But he gave his sandals to Bharata, as a pledge of his rightful claims and bade him return and rule in his absence. Bharata obeyed, but he did not return to Ayodhyā his father's capital, as the place had become distasteful to him. He settled in Nandigrāma instead, ruling the kingdom, but eagerly longing for the day when his brother would return. Feeling that Chitrakūta was too near his home, Rāma with his wife and brother plunged further into the woods, till they came to the forest of Dandaka. There he met the great sage Agastya[3] who gave him not only the sword and bow of the god Indra, but also two quivers, full of an inexhaustible store of arrows. There were many hermits living in this forest who had been cruelly used by demons, and at the hermits' request Rāma killed thousands of these wicked fiends. The chief of these demons, Rāvana, was a very mighty being. Heaven, earth and hell shook at the mention of his name. When he heard of the slaughter of so many of his followers, he told Mārīcha, one of his train to go with him, and beguile not only Rāma but Lakshmana into leaving Sitā alone in the forest. When Sitā was left alone, Rāvana carried her off, after slaying the vulture Jatāyus, which unsuccessfully opposed him. Great was Rāma's grief, when he returned and found the dead body of the vulture, and the hut empty of his love. In the hour of his extremity he was miraculousy guided to the presence of Hanūmān, the son of Vāyu, the wind-god. By Hanūmān's advice Rāma went to see Sugrīva, king of the monkeys. These monkeys were

[3] Agastya is said to have taken birth from a water pot while he had two fathers, the gods Varuna and Mitra.

despatched in every direction to make search for Sitā. It was Hanūmān himself, however, who discovered that Sitā had been carried to Lankā (Ceylon). Leaping across the straits some hundreds of miles broad, Hanūmān obtained admission to the place where Sitā was confined, gave her a ring of Rāma's as a pledge of coming deliverance, set the town of Lankā on fire, killed many of Rāvana's followers, and returned in safety to Ramā.[1] Accompanied by Sugrīva and his monkey hosts, Rāma hastened to the south of India from which a bridge was thrown across the straits. Rāvana was quickly slain and Sitā delivered. But Rāma, filled with anger and shame, spoke to his wife so bitterly that she cast herself into the fire. The wind-god, however, at once appeared on the scene, and a voice from heaven told the king to entertain no unworthy thoughts regarding his wife. Not only so, but gods and other celestial beings appeared singing the praises of Rāma. The prince thereupon took Sitā to his breast, and mounting an aerial car he quickly made his way to Nandigrāma, and his brother Bharata. With his coming the golden age indeed returned, disease and famine disappeared. Fire and tempest, flood and robbery were unknown. No one died before old age. Every one was happy, possessed of every comfort, and endowed with all that the heart of man desires.

Whoever reads this poem about Rāma will be set free from every sin and, with all his house and relatives, obtain a place in heaven. Brāhmins will secure the prize of eloquence; warriors will overcome their foes, merchants will be successful in business; Shūdras will profit by listening to it.[2]

[1] It is added that he forebore to slay Rāvana himself because of the promise which the god Brahmā had made to Rāvana that he should never die at the hands of gods or demons, and that only a man should be able to slay him.

[2] These are the four primary castes of Hinduism: Brāhmins or priests, Kshatriyas or warriors; Vaishyas or merchants; and Shūdras, labourers or mechanics. The reading of the poem was not permitted to Shūdras, but they could listen to its recital.

Valmiki's summary

Having added in conclusion that Rāma would continue to reign for 11,000 years, Nārada went off to heaven. Vālmīki himself made his way to the banks of a river. While there he saw a cruel fowler slay a curlew. The grief of the curlew's mate so touched the heart of the hermit that he uttered a curse against the murderer. As the words flowed from his lips Vālmīki realized that he had spoken in verse, not prose, and declared to his disciple that the metre of the words which he had spoken in his grief (*shoka*) should be called *shloka*. On his return to his hermitage Vālmīki was honoured by a visit from Brahmā, the Creator, to whom he made the usual offerings and brought water for his feet. The deity having sat down and bidden the saint do so also, Vālmīki, despite the presence of the god, went on lamenting the curlew's sad fate, and repeating the verse, in which he had expressed his anger and grief.

> Woe to the fowler's impious hand
> That did the deed that folly planned,
> That could to needless death devote
> The curlew of the tuneful throat.[1]

When the Creator heard the verse, he told Vālmīki that he must use his powers for the loftiest of all themes and retell for the benefit of mankind the story of Rāma and all the glorious deeds that he had done. Brahmā promised his divine aid declaring that the poem would not contain one single word of falsehood, and that as long as rivers flowed to the sea and mountains remained steadfast, so long would the great poem of the *Rāmāyana* endure. Having made this declaration the god disappeared from view. Vālmīki at once set about his task. First of all he sipped water. He then sat down on kusha grass whose points were turned to the east. Having done so the whole story of Rāma and Sitā passed before him. Everything that

[1] Quoted from Griffith's translation, p. 8.

was done and said and thought, not only that, but the whole past, present and future were open to his gaze. Of this vision, a brief summary is given, similar to what we have already recorded; but it is added that after his return to Ayodhyā Rāma once more repudiated Sitā. The hapless queen took refuge in the hermitage of Vālmīki, and there gave birth to twin sons, Kusha and Lava. To these two, when they had grown up, Vālmīki repeated his poem from end to end, and told them to go forth and repeat it to all sages and kings and common men. As they journeyed from place to place, rejoicing the hearts of all who heard them, Rāma heard of the young men and called them to his presence. Rāma was seated on a throne of gold, surrounded by his brothers and ministers of state, and at his command Kusha and Lava, whose origin their father did not know, began to tell the story of the deeds of Rāma.

Dasharatha's glorious reign

Dasharatha,[1] king of Koshala, ruled over an empire that stretched from sea to sea. His capital, Ayodhyā, built by the great Manu, was adorned with beautiful palaces and temples. Streams of water flowed through its broad streets, laying the dust and keeping the air cool. There were lakes and gardens and shade-giving trees in this mighty city which measured many miles in length. Among its inhabitants poverty was unknown; even working men were paid in gold for one day's toil. Bracelets and ear-rings were worn by the humblest. Every house was full of cattle, horses and wealth. The hours of leisure were devoted to music and dancing. There was no vice of any kind. Everyone was truthful and just. The four castes adhered to the rules of their own order, and did not intermarry. The Brāhmins were holy in life and duly performed, without a single defect, the rites of religion. The Kshatriyas, the

[1] A later canto gives a genealogy which shows that Dasharatha was some forty generations after Ikshvāku, who sprang from Manu, the creator of the present universe, while Manu is said to have been the son of Vivasvat, or the Sun (Sūrya). The Sun was a son of the *rishi* Kashyapa, who was a son of Marīchi, the son of Brahmā, the creator. Dasharatha had a son-in-law who was a grandson of Kashyapa!

warrior caste, paid due respect to Brāhmins, while the Vaishyas, or trading class, intent upon their duties recognized their subordination to those who were above them. The Shūdras, the menial caste, served as was most meet the other three. Sickness, too, was unknown. Parents lived to see their sons and grandsons. All the women were lovely and full of grace. Husbands and wives were always faithful to each other. The administration of government was without a flaw. The king's ministers acted towards all classes with impartial justice, abstaining from anger, oppression and greed. Even in the awarding of punishment they treated a culprit as a father does his son.

The horse-sacrifice

But alas, Dasharatha was without an heir, and therefore had no hope of entering heaven.[1] That he might obtain a son he resolved to perform the horse-sacrifice. After consultation with his ministers it was determined that he should invite Rishyasringa, a famous hermit, to come and make the sacrifice successful by his presence. On a former occasion Rishyasringa had been beguiled by a number of courtesans into leaving his home in the forest, and by being brought within the confines of the territory of Lomapāda, King of Anga, his sacred presence had broken a terrible drought and brought abundance of rain. In reward the hermit had gained the hand of the king's adopted daughter, Shāntā.[2] Dasharatha accordingly, accompanied by Vasishtha, one of his ministers, who like Agastya was a son of the gods Mitra and Varuna, went to Anga to his friend king Lomapāda, and after receiving hospitality for seven days and nights requested that Rishyasringa

1 A son is necessary for the performance of the funeral rites which secure admission to heaven.

2 Shāntā was really the daughter of Dasharatha, but had been given to Lomapāda, in pity for his childless state. (For the strange story of Rishyasringa see Summary of *Mahābhārata*, 79.) Brought up in the forest alone with his father, Rishyasringa had never met another human being till the courtesans beguiled him. His mother was a deer, and in consequence, he had a horn in his forehead, hence his name, 'the deer-horned'. The great saint, Sanatkumāra, had, in former ages, prophesied the birth of Rishyasringa, and the help he would render to Lomapāda and Dasharatha.

should return with him to Ayodhyā. This the youthful hermit gladly agreed to do, and when he entered the royal city of Ayodhyā, the whole population turned out to do him honour. In making preparation for the horse-sacrifice it was first of all necessary that the horse should be set free to wander at will for the space of a year, attended by a band of priests and soldiers, while invitations were sent out in all directions to Brāhmins, kings, and Shūdras, to honour the ceremony with their presence. For the entertainment of the guests many thousands of tents and booths were erected, mountains of food and lakes of liquid refreshment were brought together, while appropriate provision was made for the different castes. When the year had expired and the horse returned from its wanderings, everything was in readiness. The kings of the earth had assembled in great numbers, bringing gifts and in obedience to Dasharatha's call. The stars, too, were propitious, and under the guidance of Vasishtha and Rishyasringa, the preparatory rites were performed without a single omission or flaw. This was of the greatest importance, because wicked fiends were constantly on the watch and had there been the slightest error or defect these evil-minded creatures would have been able to render the whole sacrifice of no avail. The ceremony began with the performance of certain mystic rites and burnt offerings, lasting several days, with hymns and oblations to Indra and other deities, bathing and drinking the juice of the Soma plant. All this was done in accordance with the rules set forth in the Vedas. During these days the people were gratified with ample food and gifts of clothes. High and low, rich and poor, beggars and ascetics, even animals of every kind, shared in the royal bounty; while Brāhmins who were present in thousands were fed with the richest viands from plates of gold. Nor was pious argument forgotten by Brāhmins, keen to show their skill and their knowledge of the Vedas and

the six Vedāngas.[1] It was now time to begin the sacrifice itself. No less than three hundred animals of various kinds were bound to great stakes carefully prepared by priests and adorned with gold and ribbons, flowers and unguents. The horse, the chief victim, after being sprinkled, was laid upon an altar and the senior queen Kausalyā, having paced round it and adorned it with garlands, put it to death. The most trying part of the ceremony remained. All that night, it was necessary that the queen should, without any companion, lie beside the slain horse. When this ordeal was over and the morning had come, priests arrived, bringing the other two queens, Kaikeyi and Sumitrā, who touched the dead body. They were soon followed by the king and when the marrow of the victim's bones had been boiled in a vessel, he bent over the steaming mass that its odour might fill his nostrils. The various parts of the animal were then cast into the altar fire, and the three hundred other victims were slaughtered and burned. After more Vedic rites had been performed, chiefly in honour of Agni, the god of fire, the grateful king bestowed his whole empire upon the priestly caste. They, however, declared that they had no desire or fitness to rule and possess the earth. Their days were spent in the study of the sacred books. But they accepted the gift of ten million cows, one hundred million pieces of gold, and four times that quantity in silver, which they unanimously bestowed upon Vasishtha, the king's minister, and the hermit Rishyasringa. The latter assured the king that he would in due season have four sons born to him, but that it would be necessary to perform yet another sacred rite. This rite was so powerful and efficacious in its working that all the gods gathered to receive it, including Brahmā, Indra, Nārāyana, Sthānu[2] and the Maruts. On being addressed

[1] These are the 'limbs' for supporting the Veda. i.e aids for the student in understanding and applying the Veda itself; rules of ritual, pronunciation, metre, exposition of difficult words, grammar, astronomy.

[2] The name, Nārāyana, formerly applied to Brahmā, is here used for Vishnu, Sthānu is Shiva.

by Rishyasringa, these deities declared that Dasharatha had no cause to be anxious. His prayers would be granted out of love for himself, and their high respect for Rishyasringa.

A council in heaven

The scene now changes to the courts of heaven, where the assembled gods tell Brahmā, the Creator, that steps must be taken to deal with Rāvana, the head of the demon race, who kept both gods and saints in constant terror by his evil ways. Once upon a time Brahmā had been compelled, on account of Rāvana's great asceticism, to grant him the boon that neither gods nor demons should ever be able to prevail against him, and from that moment, trusting to Brahmā's promise, the wicked demon lorded it over earth and hell and heaven. The elements even trembled at his presence. The wind did not dare to blow, the sun could not shine, fire ceased to burn, the billows of the sea were still before him. Something had to be done. To this Brahmā replied that in his pride Rāvana had forgotten to ask for immunity from man, and that it would be possible for a man to slay him, when gods and demons were helpless. At this stage, the god Vishnu, riding upon his vehicle, the great bird Garuda, appeared, and the other deities at once began to sing him praise, saying that he and he alone could be their refuge and deliverer. When Vishnu asked in what way he could serve them, they requested him to divide himself into four, and take human form in the four sons who were soon to be born to king Dasharatha. In this way, by appearing upon earth in the fashion of man, he would be able to meet with and slay Rāvana, their destroying foe. Vishnu at once agreed to meet the wishes of the gods, and declared that in the person of Rāma, he would reign on earth for a period of 11,000 years. He at once descended to earth and, emerging from the fire of Dasharatha's sacrifice,[1] gave into the king's hand a

[1] It is here assumed that Dasharatha's sacrifice for the securing of an heir is still in process.

golden vessel full of amrita, the drink of the gods, at the same time telling him to give it to his queens. Of this amrita, Dasharatha gave half to Kausalyā, the larger part of what remained to Sumitrā, and the rest to Kaikeyi, with the result that each queen soon became pregnant. It should be added that, at a further conference in heaven, it was resolved that the gods and other celestial beings should associate with the daughters of heaven, and also with female monkeys, snakes and bears and beget on them countless swarms of creatures, who in the shape of bears and monkeys would go to the assistance of Vishnu, in his incarnation as Rāma, to fight against Rāvana. We are told that every god thus became a father; that, for example, Indra was the father of Bāli; the Sun, of Sugrīva; Vāyu, the wind god, of Hanūmān; Brishaspati, of Tāra; Kuvera, the god of wealth, of Gandhamādan; Agni, of Nīla; Vishvakarmā, of Nala; all mighty creatures, chiefly in the guise of monkeys, who rendered Rāma, incalculable service.[1] They were so numerous that they seemed to fill the earth. In due course four sons were born to Dasharatha; Kausalyā gave birth to Rāma, soon to be reckoned by all as the self-existent god; Kaikeyi gave birth to Bharata; Sumitrā was the mother of twins, Lakshmana and Shatrughna. These names were given to them by Vasishtha on the twelfth day after birth. While all the brothers were devoted to each other, Lakshmana was so fond of Rāma he could neither eat nor sleep in his brother's absence.

The incarnation of Vishnu as Rama

When Rāma was in his sixteenth year, the royal sage Vishvāmitra, who had been made a Brāhmin as a reward of his wonderful ascetic powers, came and asked Dasharatha to send his son to kill two evil spirits, who were constantly interfering with his religious rites. He told how time after time, when he had almost completed

Vishvamitra comes for Rama

[1] It is worth noting that Tulsi Das, in his *Rāmāyana*, says that the gods descended to the earth in the guise of monkeys and assisted Rāma.

some intricate ceremony, these foul creatures, who could change their forms at will, would throw pieces of flesh, and pour streams of blood upon his altar. Nor could he curse them as he would like to do, because curses at such a time rendered a sacrifice valueless. Vishvāmitra was confident that Rāma would speedily slay them. When Dasharatha heard the saint's request he was so filled with fear that he fell senseless to the ground. On recovering consciousness, he declared that he could not and would not send his son. Despite the fact that he was now 9000 years old,[1] he offered to go out against the demons himself, and take with him all his troops. But when he learned that the demons complained of where Mārīcha and Suvāhu, two of Rāvana's most powerful lieutenants, he hesitated even with regard to his own offer, saying that one of the demons was more than a match for his whole army. Vishvāmitra was very angry at receiving this refusal and, denouncing the king for his cowardice and faithlessness, got up to go away. But Vasishtha, the king's minister, interposed and told Dasharatha that he had promised to grant any boon the *rishi* chose to ask, and he would lose all the religious merit he had accumulated if he now broke his plighted word. And, in any case, he might rest assured that the piety and ascetic power of Vishvāmitra would protect his son from all harm. And more than that, Vishvāmitra was possessed of celestial weapons, unknown even to the gods. These arguments overcame the king's reluctance and summoning Rāma he bade him attend Vishvāmitra to his hermitage. As Rāma, accompanied by his brother Lakshmana, set out, the gods were so delighted that they rained down flowers, and the drums of heaven began to beat. On reaching the river Sarju, Vishvāmitra invested Rāma with spells, which delivered him from weariness and old age, hunger and thirst, endowed him with wealth, knowledge and wisdom, and exalted him above the denizens of heaven and hell.

[1] According to Mr. Dutt's translation, Dasharatha was 60,000 years old.

The celestial weapons[1], too, came into Rāma's presence when he called them, and having asked his will and made obeisance were told to vanish till he should call them at the hour of need.

The dwarf Incarnation

When they reached Vishvāmitra's hermitage, they were told that it had been the favourite haunt of the god Vishnu, when in a previous incarnation he had appeared on earth in the form of a dwarf. The circumstances, under which Vishnu appeared as a dwarf, were expounded by the sage as follows. A demon called Bali had, by the might of his asceticism, secured control of the three worlds and, not content with that, was proceeding to perform another rite, which would still further alarm the gods. The deities in consequence made appeal to Vishnu, to take the form of a dwarf and, by strategem, get the better of Bali, who was so generous to supplicants that he granted the prayer of every one who came before him. According to their request, Vishnu appeared before Bali in the form of a dwarf and made the apparently simple request that he be granted as much earth as he could cover in three steps. When Bali acceded to this petition, the dwarf at once enlarged himself to so great a size that in three steps he traversed the whole expanse of earth and heaven. Bali was thus deprived of his lordship over everything but the lower regions, to which he was immediately hurled.

The demons slain

Having told this wonderful tale Vishvāmitra began once more those rites which had so often been rudely invaded in the past. When the sixth day of their observance had passed, Rāma and Lakshmana keeping watch and ward, the sky was suddenly darkened, and the air filled by a mighty roar. Mārīcha and Suvāhu had

[1] A wonderful description of these weapons is given in a later canto. They included the trident of Shiva, the thunderbolt of Indra, the noose of Varuna, and others purely allegorical; such as the weapon with the thousand eyes, the horse's head, the false and true, desire, sleep and rest, illusion, the rich-in gain, the close-allied. See Mr. Griffith's translation. The reader will note that they were able to move about to become visible and again to become invisible of their own accord, or at the command of their master.

come pouring blood like rain over the sacred spot where Vishvāmitra was engaged at his devotions. In a moment, however, Rāma sped two arrows which slew them both; the former was hurled into the sea, hundreds of miles away, the latter came hurtling down to earth, much to the joy of all the saints who lived in the neighbourhood.[1]

The story of the Bent Virgins

Having accomplished this great work Rāma and his brother were invited by Vishvāmitra to go with him to the capital of Janaka, king of Mithilā, to witness a great sacrifice that the king was about to celebrate, and see a wonderful bow, which had been given to Janaka by the gods, and which no one either in heaven or hell had so far been able to bend. Their journey occupied several days, and each night, at their different resting places, the saint entertained his young friends by telling them interesting tales of days gone by, very often in connexion with the countries through which they were travelling. In passing through the land of Magadha Vishvāmitra told them the story of king Kushnābha and his hundred daughters. One day in the rainy season when these fair maidens were playing in a garden, the wind-god, Vāyu, was so attracted by their beauty that he invited them to abandon their earthly condition, and live with him and be his loves in heaven. The maidens, making a jest of his proposal, said that, while realizing his condescension, they preferred a life of virtue, and would never dream of ignoring their father's rights and privileges, or so forget

[1] Rama also slew, shortly before this incident, Tādakā, the mother of Mārīcha. Tādakā was the daughter of a famous saint called Suketu, a yaksha. She was the wife of Sunda, a very prominent demon. After her husband's death, Tādakā and her son had the audacity to attack the saint Agastya. It is said that they intended to eat him. The holy man put them both under a curse. Tādakā, formerly exceedingly beautiful, was changed into an ugly and fierce Rākshasi, who lived on human flesh, and her son was doomed to bear the shape and disposition of a cruel and evil-minded giant. We shall find later in the poem that Mārīcha in the form of a deer was largely responsible for the rape of Sitā, and was killed by Rāma. Why so eminent a saint as Suketu was should have married his daughter to a demon is not explained. It should be added that the gods came to watch Rāma's fight with Tādakā and were greatly delighted with the result. Indeed it was at their instigation that Vishvāmitra gave him the heavenly weapons.

themselves as to think of choosing husbands for themselves. Their father was their chief god and it was he only that they would obey. Vāyu was very angry at being thus flippantly repulsed and cursed them there and then, with the result that the poor girls returned to the palace, bent and decrepit with age, their eyes full of tears and loudly lamenting their sad calamity. When their father heard their story, he told them that he was proud of their noble answer, and bade them have patience, saying that patience in bearing misfortune even at the hands of a god, was better than alms and truth and sacrifice. Because of this calamity, the town in which these maidens lived was called Kanyākubja, the town of the Bent Virgins. Not long after Kushnābha betrothed his hundred daughters to Brahmadatta, king of Kampili. At the marriage ceremony whenever Brahmadatta [1] touched the hands of the maidens, their deformity passed away and they were restored to their former beauty.

Sagara and his 60,000 sons

On the following day, when they reached the shores of the river Ganges,[2] Vishvāmitra told them the story of Sagara and his sixty thousand sons. Sagara was king of Ayodhyā, and thus an ancestor of Rāma. Like so many other kings, he was childless and spent a hundred years in the practice of ascetism in the hope that thereby he might obtain an heir to his throne. His efforts were crowned with success and one of his queens gave birth to a son, while the other was delivered of a gourd, which split in two and revealed to view no less than sixty thousand babies. These infants were at once placed in jars of oil and kept there till

1 The maiden Somadā asked the sage Chuli, with whom she lived in pious meditation and service, to grant her a child in reward for her ascetic life. Despite the fact that she remained a virgin, her prayer was granted, and Brahmadatta was born.

2 Near the Ganges, the youths were shown the spot to which Indra retired after he had murdered Namuchi, the Asura. The god had, apparently in penance, covered his body with his own excreta. He was finally purified by the other deities who came to look for him, and assisted in the ablutions. Indra was so pleased with the district that he conferred on it an excellent boon, saying: 'Since these two places have held excreta from my body, they . . . shall attain exceeding prosperity and fame among men.'

they reached manhood. Many years passed and Sagara resolved to celebrate the horse-sacrifice. In accordance with custom the horse was set free to wander at will for the space of a year, followed by the king's grandson, Ansumān,[1] armed with bows and arrows and riding in a car. The god Indra, however, who was jealous of Sagara, appeared in the form of a demon and drove the horse away, and no trace of it could be found. When the young prince returned and told his grandfather what had happened, Sagara ordered his sixty-thousand sons to go and search for it. The princes went everywhere throughout the length and breadth of the world, digging deep into the earth for several hundred thousand miles, injuring or killing countless gods, giants, demons and animals of every kind. They dug so deep that they went right down to hell, while the noise and clamour raised by the dying victims could be heard on every hand. Filled with dread and terror, gods and demons, sages and animals sought the presence of Brahmā and appealed to him to take immediate action. That deity gave them a gracious reply and told them that the situation would soon be solved. Before long the sons of Sagara would dig themselves into the presence of the god Vishnu, in the person of the rishi Kapila, and he would consume them utterly. The gods, who are here called the Thirty-three,[2] were greatly relieved at this information, and went off to their respective abodes. In the meantime Sagara's sons had gone back to their father and told him that they had utterly failed in their quest and could do no more. In great anger the father said they must go back to their labours and not seek his presence unless they brought the horse with them. They obeyed and went on digging till they came to where the four immortal elephants stand holding up the world on their shoulders. These animals

[1] This prince was the offspring of Asamanj the son born to Sagara's other queen. Asamanj was banished for his cruelty in casting the children of his father's subjects into a river, and laughing at their dying agonies.

[2] The *Rig-Veda* speaks of thirty-three gods. See Note 3.

they greeted one after the other, but they continued their labours until, as Brahmā had said, they found themselves in the presence of the god Vishnu. He was standing before them in the form of the rishi Kapila,[1] and grazing quietly beside the sage was the horse for which they had sought so long in vain. In their joy they rushed to seize the animal, but with a cry of anger Kapila ordered them to stay their hands, and as he spoke by the blaze of the holy one's anger the whole 60,000 sons of Sagara were reduced to ashes. As time passed and his sons failed to return Sagara became more and more anxious. At length he called his grandson, Ansumān, and told him to go and look for his uncles. Following the path by which they had travelled the youth at last came to where the elephants stood, and asked them in turn if they knew where his uncles were. They all gave him the same answer. They said nothing about his uncles, but declared that he would find the horse and take it home in triumph. Cheered by this encouraging answer he hastened on and found the horse as they had said. But he was much distressed to find that his uncles had been reduced to ashes. He searched in every direction for water to enable him to make a funeral oblation, but he could find none.

As he stood lamenting their sad fate, Garuda[2], the vehicle of Vishnu, told him not to grieve, saying that in due season the river Ganges[3] herself would descend from heaven, and with her waters, which cleanse from every sin and stain, render the ashes of his dead kinsmen wholly pure, and thereby bring them safe at last to Indra's heaven. When

The Ganges' descent from heaven

1 Kapila was the author of the Sānkhya philosophy.

2 Garuda, the king of birds, was a son of Kashyapa, the rishi, who it will be remembered was a grandson of Brahmā, and an ancestor of Dasharatha and Rāma. For his strange birth see *Mahābhārata* p. 27.

3 The poems tells us that the Ganges or Ganga was the daughter of Himālaya, the lord of the mountains. It is said that Himālaya gave his daughter to all the gods, being mindful of the welfare of the three worlds. Himālaya had another daughter, Umā, married to the god Rudra or Shiva. His part in the tale duly follows.

Ansumān got home and told what had happened, his grandfather completed the horse-sacrifice, but thereafter devoted the rest of his life, for no less a space than thirty-thousand years, to asceticism, in the hope that he might devise some way of bringing the river Ganges down from heaven. Not only did Sagara spend these long years in ascetic practices, but his grandson and great-grandson passed an even greater number in ever increasing devotion, pondering over the same problem, how to bring the Ganges down and secure heaven for Sagara's sixty-thousand sons.

The next in succession, Bhagīratha, was more successful. He spent an equally long time in ascetic practices, even abandoning his kingdom in the fervour of his devotion. In winter he lay in the bed of a stream, in summer he sat between the five fires,[1] in the rainy season he lay out exposed to the elements, and at last his prayer was heard. Brahmā took pity on his sufferings and, attended by the other gods, came and told him to ask a boon. The boon he asked was, of course, that the Ganges might be brought down from heaven, but the god pointed out that to break the force of the waters in their descent it would be necessary to elicit the help of the god Shiva, and ask him to allow the waters to fall mid-way upon his head. This demanded further devotion, and for twelve months Bhagīratha stood upright and motionless, bearing the weight of his body on a single toe, with arms upraised. Throughout the whole year he never ate and he never slept. Happily when the year was at an end Shiva was mollified, and agreed to act as Brahmā had proposed, namely, to let the waters of the Ganges fall upon his head. The goddess, however, had not been consulted, and was very angry and also very unwilling to descend. But she could not disobey. Accordingly she came pouring all her waters with furious violence on Shiva's head, hoping to sweep her brother-in-law not only

[1] The Indian ascetic still sits between the five fires. One at each of the four corners of the place where he is sitting; the fifth is the sun overhead.

into the sea but down to hell. The god withstood the shock quite unmoved, and to punish the goddess and to tame her pride kept her waters wandering through his locks for years.[1] When they reached the earth at last, Bhagīratha mounted a swift car and drove towards the spot where the ashes of his kinsmen lay. Wherever he went the waters of the Ganges meekly followed. The gods were so much interested that they came down from heaven, and in their golden chariots joined in the procession. A motley crowd of heavenly nymphs, giants, demons, sages and snakes added themselves to the company. An unlucky incident nearly marred the success of Bhagīratha's long devotion. The waters happened to flow over the spot where the sage Jahnu, was sacrificing, and in his anger he at one gulp swallowed the river. It was fortunate that there were so many gods and sages near at hand. They begged the saint to relent and look upon the river as his own daughter. This line of appeal impressed the saint and he graciously released the waters from his ears. When Ganga reached the place where the ashes of Sagar's sons were lying, their souls at the first contact of the sacred stream were delivered from the curse that had been passed upon them so many thousand years before, and they at once mounted to heaven and eternal bliss. Having accomplished his purpose and received the congratulation of the gods, Bhagīratha returned to his kingdom, where he reigned for many happy years over a rich and prosperous people among whom sickness and sorrow were unknown.[2]

[1] He held the river on his head,
And kept her wandering, where
Dense as Himālaya's woods, were spread
The tangles of his hair.
No way to earth she found, ashamed,
Though long and sore she strove,
Condemned, until her pride were tamed,
Amid his locks to rove.

Griffith's translation, p. 54–5.

[2] The recital of this story, it is here said, confers upon its hearers length of days, happiness, wealth and fame. The Ganges was called from that day Bhagīrathi, the daughter of Bhagīratha. As the king had been up to this time childless, the gods promised that a son would be born to him.

Next day, their journey brought them to the beautiful city of Vishālā. When Rāma asked the saint to tell them its story, he recounted to them the wonderful incident known as the *Churning of the Ocean.* In the golden age Kashyapa, the rishi, was married to sisters, called Diti and Aditi. The former was mother of the demons, the latter was mother of the gods.[1] These half-brothers did not live in love and friendship. The gods we are told were good and upright, but the demons or titans were full of jealousy and pride. On one occasion, however, they made a compact and agreed to join forces in the churning of the sea of milk, with a view to releasing from its waters the liquor known as amrita, which confers immortality. They accordingly made use of Mount Mandara as their churning pole, and the serpent Vāsukī as their churning string. For a thousand years gods and demons worked at their task, the snake all the while pouring forth venom in its anger and pain. This poison poured along the ground and over the world in such quantities that the homes of gods, demons and men were on the point of being consumed. But on being appealed to Shiva came to the rescue and consumed the poison. Vishnu laughingly told him that as the oldest of the gods it was his duty and privilege to receive first share of what came out of the Ocean.[2]

The Churning of the Ocean

Having been saved from one danger the toilers were soon exposed to another. The weight of the mountain, enhanced by the fact that it was always revolving, pierced a hole right through the bottom of the earth. This time

Vishnu in the Tortoise Incarnation

[1] See Note 4. Story of correction.

[2] Shiva is called Nil-Kantha, blue throat, because the poison stained his throat that colour. It should also be noted that the sea of milk was one of the seven seas which are said to surround the world; that the golden age of Krita-Yuga is the first of the four ages. It lasted one million seven hundred and twenty-eight thousand years; Mount Mandara was said to be eleven thousand yojanas high; a yojana is equal to seven miles. The name of Titans is given to these demons by Griffith and others. This is in line with those stories of Greek mythology which tell of the battles between the Titans and the gods.

(For the *Mahābhārata's* description of the churning of the ocean, see *Mahābhārata.* p. 26).

they made appeal to Vishnu and he assumed the form of a large *tortoise*, on whose firm and immoveable back the mountain was able to rest secure. When the thousand years were completed there came out of the ocean Dhanwantari,[1] the physician of the gods, accompanied by sixty millions of fair ladies, born from the foam and called, for that reason, Apsarases. They were attended by a still greater multitude of hand-maidens. The demons tried to secure the affection of the Apsarases, but they preferred the gods who still hold them in common. Other products of the ocean were Lakshmi, the goddess of Fortune, the horse Uchchhaishravas, Soma, the moon-god, and Surā, the daughter of Varuna.[2] This damsel would have liked to associate with the demons, but they declined the honour, and she transferred her affections to the gods, for which reason they came to be called Suras, while the demons were called Asuras. When the amrita was produced last of all, a great fight took place between the two parties for its possession. The battle raged for many days, but in the end, thanks to a trick which Vishnu played, the demons were overcome and slain.[3]

The story of Diti and Indra

When Diti, the mother of the demons saw her children slain, she at once appealed to their father, Kashyapa, to take pity on her childless state and give her a son, who would some day slay Indra, the leader of the gods. Kashyapa comforted his weeping spouse and told her that a son would be born at the end of a

[1] Dhanwantari was impregnated with the Ayurveda (Science of Medicine) See Dutt's translation p. 110. The claim is made that he was the source of the Ayurvedic system of medicine.

[2] In explaining that Sura, in the feminine, means all sorts of intoxicating liquors, Schlegel comments on the fact that nothing is considered more disgraceful among orthodox Hindus than drunkenness. He thinks it was not dignified of the gods to have received a nymph so pernicious. She should have been made over to the demons. See Griffith, p. 58.

[3] The *Vishnu Purāna* tells the story of the Churning of the Ocean differently. It says that as a result of a curse pronounced on them by the rishi Durvāsa, the gods had lost their strength, and in consequence became subject to the demons. Having appealed for help to Vishnu, that deity told his brother gods to churn the ocean. The amrita, or lifegiving liquor, gave them the necessary strength, and they were able to overcome the demons and cast them down to hell.

thousand years, if she would devote all that time, with a pure and single mind, to the practice of devotion. As to the son, when he was born, the rishi declared that he would slay Indra and wrest from him the lordship of the three worlds. Having made these promises, Kashyapa resumed the practice of his religious rites, which his wife had interrupted. The lady, highly elated, and apparently not at all discouraged by the thought that a thousand years at least must elapse before she would obtain revenge, at once began those rites which her husband had told her to employ. In her hermitage she was soon joined by a strange assistant, no less a person than her step-son, Indra, whose destruction she above all things desired. He brought her wood, water and fruit. He supplied all her wants with the greatest affection, striving by every means in his power to ease her of her burden. When nine hundred and ninety years had passed away, Diti told Indra that ten short years would see the end of all their toil and pain, and that his eyes would be gladdened by the sight of a step-brother. She told him that she would rear the child for his special benefit and save him from the trouble of ruling the world. But ere the child was born Indra destroyed it in the womb. Strange to say the mother showed no feeling of anger. On the contrary she told the god that she alone was to blame. She begged, however, one boon, and that was that the unborn fruit which Indra had divided into seven parts might become the seven gods of the storm and bear the name of Maruts. Indra consented and promised that they would get their share of amrita, and thus be endowed with immortality.[1] The poet adds that Indra and Diti were very content with this arrangement, and went off in one another's company to heaven. Vishvāmitra showed Rāma and Lakshmana the very place where Diti had her hermitage, and was so faithfully

1 In this way the Maruts obtained what their mother's other children had failed to secure. Until they drank the amrita the gods were not immortal. The reader will note that on various occasions it is said that the demons were formerly the rulers of the universe, and eventually displaced by the gods their younger brothers.

tended by the great god Indra. As the sun had now set they made the sacred spot their camping ground for the night.

The next day brought the travellers within sight of their destination, the town of Mithilā. Outside its walls the attention of Rāma was drawn to a sacred grove, apparently deserted and overgrown with trees and brushwood. Vishvāmitra explained that long years before it had been the home of the great sage Gautama, but that since his time a curse had rested upon it, because of the great crime which had been committed within its precincts. Engaged in the practice of the most severe ascetism, Gautama and his wife Ahalyā had witnessed the passing of many thousand years. One day when Gautama chanced to be absent, gathering grass and fuel for his sacred rites, the god Indra of the thousand eyes came to the grove and seeing Ahalyā was smitten by her beauty. He at once assumed the form of Gautama and sought her embraces. Although the lady knew that it was in truth not her husband, but a stranger and a god who thus addressed her, she was consumed by the fires of love, and did that which she ought to have refused to do. But it was not long before she was filled with dread and bade the god take refuge in flight and save both himself and her. Infected with her alarm the guilty god set off as quickly as he could. At the entrance to the grove, he met the man whom he had wronged. When Gautama saw Indra emerging from the hermitage, he at once understood what had happened, and cursed him to be for ever deprived of his strength and manhood. As to his wife, he turned to her with the utmost fury and condemned her to pass countless years in the most severe asceticsm unseen by any human eye, condemned to live on air and to make her bed of ashes. As for himself, he forsook the grove and retired to the Himālayas. There was, however, hope for her in the end. Gautama declared that when Rāma, the son of Dasharatha, should come in a future age to her

Indra and Ahalya

dwelling-place his presence would cleanse her of her sin and restore her to his side. Having heard this wonderful story Rāma with his brother entered the grove. As the prince clasped the lady's feet flowers fell from heaven and the celestial choirs began to dance and sing. The gods, too, came and praised Ahalyā, bidding her rejoice that her long penance was over. In his distant home among the mountains, Gautama, to whom nothing was unknown, became conscious that Rāma had visited his ancient dwelling-place. He at once appeared and took Ahalyā to his arms. Cleansed of her sin she once more joined her husband in the practice of austerities, while Rāma and his frieds made their way to Mithilā.[1]

The quarrel between Vishvamitra and Vasishtha

On reaching Mithilā the travellers found that king Janaka had made great preparations for the approaching sacrifice. Thousands of Brāhmins had already gathered from far and near to render their assistance. When news of their arrival reached the king he came to greet Vishvāmitra, overwhelmed with delight that so great a saint should honour the sacrifice by his presence. The king declared that the coming of the saint was sure to crown his efforts with success. Rāma and Lakshmana, by their godlike mien, made a great impression on the king and he asked who they were and from whence they had come. Vishvāmitra gave an account of Rāma's exploits and, in particular, told how by his visiting the hermitage of Gautama he had fulfilled that sage's ancient prophecy and delivered Ahalyā from all her woes. It so happened that Janaka's minister was Shatānanda, a son of Gautama and Ahalyā, and he was overjoyed to learn of the recon-

[1] Two other tales, involving Shiva, Uma and Ganga, in connexion with the birth of Kārttikeya, are of such a character that they do not permit of description. Mr. Griffith omits them entirely from his translation, saying that both in subject and language they are offensive to modern taste.

ciliation that had taken place between his parents.[1] While thanking Rāma for his services he in particular congratulated him on having secured the society and help of so great a sage as Vishvāmitra. He thereupon told the story of Vishvāmitra's life. He was, he said, the son of Gādhi, who was in turn the son of Kusanābha, the father of the bent virgins of whom we have already heard. For countless years Vishvāmitra ruled over a happy and prosperous kingdom. One day, attended by a great army, he came to the grove of Vasishtha[2] who received him with greatest cordiality. Not content with feeding him and his army with hermits's fare, the sage proposed to prepare a great banquet which the king more than once declared was quite unnecessary, as he had already received more than he required or deserved.

The cow of plenty

The saint, however, would take no denial and the wonderful cow of plenty, Kāmdhenu,[3] was called upon to exercise her miraculous powers. She at once produced food of every kind, rice, honey, curdled milk, sweetmeats and sugar-cane, with drinks of various sorts in overflowing abundance, more than enough to satisfy the hunger of the king's army. But covetousness, alas! seized the soul of king Vishvāmitra and he asked the sage to make him a present of the wonderful cow. He offered first a hundred thousand cows, then ten million cows. He offered fourteen thousand elephants and eleven thousand horses. He was willing to give anything if only the sage would give him the cow. When Vasishtha absolutely refused to part with the animal, Vishvāmitra declared that he would exercise the prerogative of kings and take her by force. And he accordingly began to drag the cow away. At first

[1] It is difficult to realize the amazing length of years which are alloted to human and semi-demi human beings in this poem. Some of them must have been, at a moderate computation, more than a hundred thousand years old. Gautama and Ahalyā had been separated for countless years and yet we find their son acting as minister to king Janaka.

[2] It will be remembered that Vasishtha was prime minister to Rāma's father, Dasharatha.

[3] Kāmdhenu, the cow of plenty, was a daughter of the rishi Kashyapa.

the poor cow thought that Vasishtha was consenting to the transfer, but she resolved to find out the true state of matters and broke away from her captors. Casting herself at the sage's feet she lifted up her voice and wept, imploring him to tell her if it was indeed his will that she should leave him. To this Vasishtha replied that his heart was broken at the thought of losing her, but what could a poor Brāhmin do in opposition to a king supported by a mighty host of armed men. The cow replied that he was not talking like a wise man. He had forgotten that there was no strength in earth equal to that of a Brāhmin, and that kings and princes had to bend before their might. He was possessed of divine power and it was his duty to exercise it.

Thus encouraged Vasishtha told the cow to produce from her own body an army of soldiers. At the word there issued from the cow a great multitude of Pahlavas, who at once engaged in battle with the army of king Vishvāmitra. Unfortunately these Pahlavas were not a match for Vishvāmitra's army, and every one of them was slain. The cow, nothing daunted, produced a host of Yavanas and Shakas, Kambojas and Barbaras. But these also fell victims to the weapons of Vishvāmitra and his men. This time it seemed to require an effort on the part of the cow; but we are told that she put forth all her strength, with the result that not only soldiers of the races already mentioned, but also Mlechchhas and Kiratas[1] issued from every part of her body, from every hair and every pore. This was the cow's final effort and she required to do no more. Vasishtha soon had the satisfaction of seeing his enemies lying dead at his feet, with the exception of Vishvāmitra and his sole surviving son. In the heat of the combat no less

The cow works a miracle

[1] The Pahlavas are Persians; the Shakas, Scythians; Yavanas, Greeks; Mlechchhas, out-castes or foreigners; Kiratas, wild aborigines; Barbaras, the Greek *barbaroi* (in English, barbarians); Kāmbojas are said to belong to the north-west of India.

All these races are spoken of in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Laws of Manu*. They were supposed to be degraded Kshetriyas.

than one hundred sons of the king had tried to slay the sage, but with his angry glance he reduced them all to ashes. Thirsting for revenge, Vishvāmitra handed over his kingdom to the son mentioned above and retired to the Himālayas, where he devoted himself for many years to securing the favour of the great god Shiva. When Shiva at last appeared and asked what he wanted, he prayed that he would show him how to use every weapon that had ever been wielded by gods and demons.

Shiva helps Vishvamitra to no purpose

The god heard his prayer and Vishvāmitra at once hastened, highly elated, to Vasishtha's hermitage, which he set on fire. The sage's pupils were greatly alarmed and called upon their master to take refuge in flight. But Vasishtha scornfully asked them what need they had to fly. He promised them instead that, before the sun was set, they would see Vishvāmitra slain before their eyes. It would appear that Vishvāmitra had got the use of those very celestial weapons, which we have already heard of as having been given to Rāma. Their names are once more recorded with great detail, and it is told how Vishvāmitra launched them one after the other at the sage. But each and all of them were robbed of their power by the raising of the Brāhmin's staff. They poured upon the saint like rain; but one after another, the Brāhmin's staff consumed them. Last of all Vishvāmitra called to his aid the dart of Brahmā. That weapon is so terrible that gods began to tremble and the three worlds shook with fear. But it too failed to accomplish anything; it too was absorbed and consumed, yet so great and awful was this dart, that it imparted to the Brāhmin's wand a brilliance terrible to behold, and made it look like the sceptre of Yama, the god of the lower world, and like the fire of Fate which desolates the world. Beholding this great sight the sage's pupils cried aloud with mingled joy and fear, while Vishvāmitra, realizing that he had been once more overcome, confessed that the strength of

the greatest warrior was as nothing compared to the might of a Brāhmin. He there and then resolved that he would devote his days to the practice of asceticism, in the hope that he would persuade the gods to make him a Brāhmin.

Vishvamitra practices asceticism

In pursuance of this object Vishvāmitra set off for the south of India, accompanied by his queen. He made for himself a hermitage in a lonely spot, where he lived for a thousand years. There he devoted himself to the practice of asceticism. When the thousand years had come to an end Brahmā appeared and told him that as a reward for his devotion, the gods had resolved to confer upon him the rank and dignity of a *royal sage*, but said nothing about Brāhminhood. Vishvāmitra was, of course, not at all pleased with this concession, and though he did not venture to say so openly he told himself that his penance, so far, had been all in vain, if it could secure nothing better that the rank of *royal sage*. He would not own defeat however, and began to redouble his penance. How powerful that penance became we shall now hear from the record of what he was able to accomplish for Trishanku. This Trishanku was a king of Ayodhyā, an ancestor of Rāma, seventh in descent from Ikshvāku, and twenty-seven generations before Dasharatha. He had formed the strange resolve that, if penance and sacrifice could accomplish it, he would never die, but be transported straight to heaven in his bodily form. When he spoke to Vasishtha[1] about it that distinguished Brāhmin assured him that he could never hope to be successful in such an impossible resolve. When the saint refused to give him any encouragement Trishanku turned for counsel to Vasistha's hundred sons, every one of whom was distinguished for his ascetic powers. He assured them that if they would assist him in his efforts he would worship them as gods. The sons of Vasishtha,

[1] Evidently Vasishtha continued to act as minister to the kings of Ayodhā for at least twenty-seven generations.

however, refused to help him and said that it was highly improper of the king to come to them after their father had declared that nothing could be done. To this Trishanku answered that if they and their father either would not or could not help him, he would find others who both could and would. The godly men naturally were greatly incensed at this insulting language, and by the exercise of their ascetic power they turned the poor king into a Chandāla [1] Ugly and black in colour, wearing nothing but a scanty loin cloth and bracelets of iron, the very image of woe, Trishanku returned to his capital from which the people fled in fear at his approach.

Vishvamitra befriends Trishanku

But his purpose was still unshaken. He had made up his mind to seek the aid of Vishvāmitra, the great enemy of Vasishtha. Naturally Vishvāmitra lent a willing ear to the king's story. Both seemed to be seeking the impossible. Both had suffered grievously at the hands of Vasishtha and his sons. At first Trishanku seemed to have entirely lost heart. In telling the sad tale of his sufferings he declared that Fate ruled over all things and rendered human effort utterly vain, but before he had finished, he recovered his courage and called upon his royal brother to help him to conquer Fate. In reply Vishvāmitra told him not to be afraid. He would transport him to the skies and in the very form in which he then was, that of a vile Chandāla. Turning to his pupils and his four sons, who had been born to him in the hermitage, Vishvāmitra told them to make preparations for a great sacrifice. Brāhmins from all quarters, including Vasishtha and his sons, were invited to attend. When Vasishtha received the message he declined to come. His sons not only refused but sent an insulting reply. They asked what purpose was to be served by attending a sacrifice, where the person officiating did not belong to the Brāhminical caste. They also wanted

[1] The Chandāla is the lowest of all the out-castes. He is the son of a Shūdra and a Brāhmin woman.

to know how gods and Brāhmins were to eat the food and to receive the offerings of a king who for his presumption had to be changed into a Chandāla. When Vishvāmitra heard this insulting message he cursed Vasishtha and his hundred sons. As to the former he declared that he was a great fool, if he thought that he could stain his stainless reputation and cursed him to be born into the fowler caste, in which he would spend long years, devoid of pity, and a shedder of innocent blood. The sons he condemned to immediate death and said that they would pass through seven hundred births in so abject a condition that they would be glad to eat the flesh of dogs and wear the clothing of dead men.[1] By this time all the other Brāhmins had arrived and were greatly perturbed at hearing such vigorous curses. They told each other that they must attend most carefully to all that Vishvāmitra told them to do and assist him to the utmost in securing the translation of Trishanku to the upper world. Should any hitch take place there was no telling but the wrath of Vishvāmitra might consume them also.

Raises Trishanku to the skies

In accordance with this resolve everything was done with the most scrupulous exactness and care. And then came the culminating point, when the gods should appear and take their part in the sacrifice. But the gods unanimously declined to present themselves. Vishvāmitra, however, refused to acknowledge defeat. If the gods would not act, he would. He turned to the king and, telling him to have faith in his ascetic power, he commanded him to ascend to heaven. The command had scarcely left the lips of Vishvāmitra when the astonished multitude saw Trishanku mounting higher and higher through the skies. But the god Indra was watching all that took place and, supported by the other gods, he told Trishanku that he was an unwelcome guest and bade him to return to earth. Thus, not only

[1] This curse does not appear to have taken effect in the case of Vasishtha, at least. The poem does not say that the sons really died, though a later reference in the fourth book indicates that they did.

arrested in his upward career but sent headlong back to earth, the disappointed king called aloud to Vishvāmitra, entreating him to save him from destruction. Seeing what was happening, Vishvāmitra uttered a counterblast. Indra had cried, 'Fall headlong;' Vishvāmitra cried, 'Stay where you are,' with the result that Trishanku remained suspended half way between earth and heaven. Naturally Vishvāmitra was more angry than ever at the continued interference with his plans, and he resolved to creat new gods and new stars. He had already created quite a number of stars, and had just begun to make a new Indra, who would eject the old Indra from his throne, when the other gods, as well as the saints and demons, intervened. They came to Vishvāmitra, in a body, and endeavoured to appease his wrath. They pointed out that it was quite impossible, and contrary to all custom, to receive into heaven an individual who had been reduced to the level of a Chandāla, and was still undelivered from the curse that had been passed upon him. To their appeal Vishvāmitra turned a deaf ear. He told the gods that he was quite resolved to carry out his purpose. Trishanku would go to heaven in spite of them, and in the form in which he then was. As to the stars, which he had already created, they must remain as a permanent testimony to his power. As to the making of other gods, and especially another Indra,[1] he appears to have relented. At least, we are told that in those terms, the god agreed to a compromise. They promised that the multitude of stars which Vishvāmitra had already fashioned would remain shining in the sky for ever, while Trishanku was suspended head downwards, in their midst.

Vishvamitra at Pushkara

Not long after his battle with the gods, in defence of Trishanku, Vishvāmitra got tired of southern India. He told his sons and disciples that he felt there were too many hindrances to the progress and success

[1] See, however, the story of the five old Indras in the *Mahābhāratha* (Summary p. 47).

of their devotion. He accordingly proposed that they should go northward, and he chose a hermitage on the shores of Pushkara, India's most sacred lake.[1] Some time after they settled at Pushkara Vishvāmitra encountered his nephew, Shunahshepha, who told him a very remarkable story. It was as follows: Ambarīsha, king of Ayodhyā, had begun a horse-sacrifice, but the horse had been spirited away by the god Indra and no trace of it could be found. The officiating priest blamed the king for his remissness and said that having lost the horse he must find a man who was willing to suffer in its stead. The king put himself to a great deal of trouble, trying to find a man who would agree to act as a substitute. He visited different countries. He went to towns and hermitages offering large sums, but to no purpose. At last he arrived at the hermitage of the Brāhmin Richīka, whom he found sitting on the ground surrounded by his wife and three sons. The king approached the saint, as he had approached so many others, and asked him if he would surrender one of his sons to be a sacrificial victim. He offered no less than a hundred thousand cows if he would agree to do so. Richīka replied that he certainly would not part with the eldest son, while his wife, who was a sister of Vishvāmitra, said that she would never consent to give the youngest. Fathers always loved their first-born; mothers were most devoted to the baby of the family. Hills of gold added to innumerable cows would not make them consent to surrender either of these two. They said nothing of the remaining son, Shunashepha.[2] He, poor youth, at once interposed and, without any pressure from his parents, voluntered to be a victim, adding somewhat cynically that apparently the son who came between was destined to be sold.

[1] Pushkara, near Ajmer in Rājputāna, is still one of India's most frequented places of pilgrimage.

[2] This story of Shunashepha is also recorded in the *Aitareya Brahmin* VII. 3, Haug's Translation (compare *Laws of Manu*, p. 100).

Ambarīsha was greatly delighted. He handed over to the Brāhmin the hundred thousand cows that he had promised, and having thus purchased Shunashepha set off with him in the direction of his home. On the way they came to the shores of lake Pushkara. Soon after their arrival Shunashepha saw and recognized his uncle, Vishvāmitra. By this time the young man had begun to repent of his rash undertaking and appealed to his relative to do something to save him from an untimely death. The heart of Vishvāmitra went out in pity to the unfortunate boy and he asked his four sons if they would be willing to go and take their cousin's place in the sacrifice. He pointed out that there was great merit in listening to the cry of the suppliant, and that they had now an admirable opportunity of showing that they had profited from the example of their father's life and teaching. Not unnaturally Vishvāmitra's sons exclaimed against what seemed to them to be a very unfatherly proposal. To make one's own sons die in place of another was a horrid thing they thought, indeed they compared it to eating one's own flesh. Vishvāmitra's hair stood on end as he listened to this very strong language on the part of his irreverent and disobedient sons. In the end he so lost control of himself that he condemned them to the same fate as he had already devoted the hundred sons of Vasishtha. He declared that they would spend a thousand years passing from birth to birth and feeding upon dog's flesh. Something, however, had yet to be devised for Shunashepha's deliverance. By the time he had recovered his equanimity Vishvāmitra had conceived a plan. He told his nephew that when he was bound to the stake and had been crowned with the sacrificial garland, he was to recite two hymns in praise of Agni, and he would find that no harm would come to him. It is needless to say that the youth learned these hymns with the utmost care before he left Pushkara, and when the time came to depart, he set out for Ayodhyā with a contented mind. All

Shunashepha sold for a man-sacrifice

happened as Vishvāmitra had foretold. The youth was bound to the sacrificial stake, after he had been declared free from all blemish. But while he stood, waiting as all supposed for the knife's fatal blow, he sang the two hymns his uncle had taught him in praise of Agni and Indra, and Vishnu of the thousand eyes. It was Vishnu, we are told, who set him free, while Indra graciously accepted the sacrifice as if it had been offered in full, and granted the king more than he had hoped to obtain by offering it.[1]

The tempting of Vishvamitra

Another thousand years passed away, and Vishvāmitra was still living on the shores of Pushkara lake, as eager as ever in his penitential toil, as determined to secure the rank of a Brāhmin. The gods had been much impressed by his efforts, and they now felt that they must make a further concession. It will be remembered that when Vishvāmitra was in southern India, they had conferred upon him the dignity of 'Royal Sage.' On this occasion they chose for him the rank of 'Saint,' and by the mouth of Brahmā announced to him that his austerities and virtue had secured for him that lofty rank. To this information, as far as one can gather, Vishvāmitra made no reply. But manifestly he was not content. His austeritities became more arduous than before. Many more years passed and Vishvāmitra continued to dwell by the shores of Pushkara. Alas, the day of his downfall was near at hand. The beautiful maiden, Menakā, came down from heaven to bathe in the sacred waters. Vishvāmitra saw her as she sported there, and smitten by the darts of love fell a victim to her charms. When the saint urged his suit the maiden was not unwilling, and the

[1] This Ambarīsha, another of Rāma's ancestors, was twenty-ninth in descent from Ikshvāku. We have just seen that Trishanku, the hero of the previous story, was seventh in descent. Twenty-two generations have thus elapsed between Vishvāmitra's residence in South India and his stay on the shores of Pushkara. Note further that he is now journeying with Rāma who is in the fortieth descent.

two lived together for ten years.[1] During all that time Vishvāmitra abandoned entirely his rites and ceremonies, listening to the voice of his passions alone. But at last his eyes were opened. He realized his shame and, in particular, realized that the coming of Menakā was a conspiracy of the gods to wean him from his austerities and rob him of his toil. He told the maiden to depart, while for himself he fled from the scene of his downfall and took refuge among the Himālayas. There he began the practice of austerities more severe than any he had yet attempted, and persevered in them for another thousand years. The gods became positively alarmed, and after conference in heaven resolved that now Vishvāmitra should have conferred on him the rank of 'Mighty Saint.' This decision was on this occasion also communicated to the ascetic by the lips of Brahmā. But Vishvāmitra gave the calm reply, 'There is only one title that will satisfy me. When you call me by the name of *Brāhmin*, I shall be content. Then I shall know that I have brought my senses under control.' 'If that is what you want,' said Brahmā, 'you will need to make a bigger effort than any you have yet made.'

The story of Rambha

The god went off to heaven. Vishvāmitra redoubled his efforts. He stood on one foot for a thousand years, keeping his hands raised high above his head, never moving night or day. In the hot days of summer he was surrounded by the five fires. In the rainy season, he was exposed to wind and rain and sought no shelter. If he ever lay down at all, he made his bed in the mountain torrents. The air was his only food throughout the passing of the centuries. Once more fear possessed the souls of the gods. They were resolved that something must be done to save themselves and to crush finally this ambitious and

[1] The *Mahābhārata* tells us that Menakā gave birth to a daughter, Shakuntalā, who was abandoned by her parents. The sage Kanwa found the child and reared her as his own daughter. She is the heroine of the famous drama by Kālidasa, which tells of her marriage to king Dushmanta (see summary of *Mahābhārata* pp. 33, 34).

relentless devotee. It was Indra who conceived the plan that seemed to offer most hopes of a successful issue. We have seen how they succeeded in the case of Menakā. Indra now summoned another celestial maiden into his presence. Her name was Rambhā. When told to go and tempt Vishvāmitra as Menakā had tempted him, Rambhā was greatly alarmed and reminded the god that the hermit was famous for his hasty temper and the strength of his curses. Indra assured her that she need not be afraid. He himself would go in the form of a cuckoo, in the days of spring, and ravish the saints's heart with music. The god of love also would lend his aid. The three of them combined would beguile the hermit by leading him from the paths of virtue and rob him of all that he had achieved. Accordingly, Indra and Rambhā, accompanied by the god of love, began to besiege the heart of the sage. The cuckoo sang his sweetest note, the nymph displayed all her charms. The music stirred his heart, he realized that the maiden was beautiful. But when the god prolonged his note and when the nymph began to smile, Vishvāmitra knew that he was being exposed to further temptation. He knew that the gods were once more plotting his destruction. Poor Rambhā was the chief object of his wrath. He cursed her to be changed into a stone and to remain in the place where she then was for the space of ten-thousand years. But Vishvāmitra realized that giving way to anger was also a barrier to progress, and that this outburst of which he had been guilty had achieved the purpose of the gods and stripped him of all the merit he had gathered. He accordingly resolved to devote himself to this one object, namely, to subdue his wrath. And with that end in view he spent another thousand years in absolute silence. He never opened his mouth, he hever spoke, he never ate, he even held his breath for a thousand years. The result was that his body became as dry as a log of wood, not to speak of other marvels which the mind of man can neither describe nor comprehend.

When the thousand years were over, he sat down to eat some boiled rice. But the sleepless Indra was on the watch. Disguised as a Brāhmin beggar he drew near and asked for a portion of Vishvāmitra's scanty meal. Without tremor the mighty saint handed him the whole. He watched the Brāhmin eat it, and never said a word, never made an impatient gesture. The saint was unmoved, but the triple worlds were filled with commotion; gods and saints, demons and serpents gathered together once more, alarmed and oppressed with sorrow and fear. They told Brahmā that every intrigue, all their plots and cunning had been in vain. If something was not done, and done speedily, the three worlds would be destroyed. Already nature was in a state of convulsion. The sun had ceased to shine, the hills had sunk down to the plains, tempests filled the skies, the waves of the sea refused to retire, religion was imperilled, and the gods would be speedily dethroned. There was no help for it. Brahmā must make the man a Brāhmin, and that without any more delay. The creator accepted the advice of his brother deities, and calling Vishvāmitra, *Brāhmin saint*, informed him that the desire of his heart was now achieved. He added the hope that he would live long and be happy. But Vishvāmitra, having been disappointed so often, was resolved that his title should be clearly acknowledged by the Brāhmin caste. He therefore requested that his old enemy, Vasishtha, the greatest of all Brāhmins, be invited to come and confirm the boon which the gods had granted. Brahmā agreed to this also, but it required a strong effort to persuade Vasishtha to come. When he did come at last, Vasishtha declared in the presence of the gods that Vishvāmitra's title was without a flaw. He was both a Brāhmin and a saint. Having settled the matter so satisfactorily, Vishvāmitra invited his new caste-fellow to accept of his hospitality,[1] and the gods went off to heaven.

Vishvamitra made a Brahmin

[1] The acceptance of hospitality was a further recognition of his being a real Brāhmin, as eating with people of other castes is not allowed in Hinduism.

Having completed his description of Vishvāmitra's long penance and victory, Shatānanda was congratulated by Vishvāmitra himself for having told it so well. Janaka was overcome with delight, and said his ears never wearied of listening to a tale which described the unparalleled asceticism and boundless virtues of the sage, whose presence at his approaching sacrifice filled him with joy unspeakable. As the sun had set he invited them to seek repose.

Rama bends the bow of Shiva

Next morning, in reply to Janaka's questioning, Vishvāmitra explained that he had brought Rāma and Lakshmana to let them see the bow of Shiva. Janaka said he would be glad to show it, and told how for many centuries it had been in the possession of his family. It was the very bow that Shiva had used when in his anger he smote the gods and drove them before him in headlong flight. Daksha,[1] the great Prajāpati, had on one occasion celebrated a sacrifice and, in sending out his invitation to the gods to honour it with their presence, failed to include Shiva. As we have said, Shiva, in his indignation, went to the sacrifice, attacked his brother deities and wounded them very severely. On their humbling themselves before him Shiva not only forgave them, but healed their fractured limbs. Such being its origin and history, it was not a matter for wonder that Janaka held the bow in high honour, as the best and greatest of all his heir-looms. Janaka told his visitors another remarkable incident. One day when ploughing he found a tiny female child issuing, as it were, from the furrow beneath his ploughshare, and gave to her in consequence the name of Sītā.[2]

1 Daksha is said to have been born from the right toe of Brahmā. He was one of the Prajāpatis or lords of creatures. The name of Prajāpati is sometimes ascribed to Brahmā himself. For a description of this wonderful sacrifice, and its bearing on the origin of fever, see summary of *Mahābhārata*, pp. 173–5, and Note 7, 'The Sacrifice of Daksha.'

2 Sītā means a furrow. Students of comparative religion call attention to the similarity between this reference and the story of Proserpine.

The child had now grown up, but in view of her miraculous birth he was anxious to choose a husband who was worthy of her. Many princes had come to woo her, but to every one of them he had proposed the same test. He had invited them to bend the great bow of Shiva. Prince after prince had tried and failed and been dismissed. These individuals, angry at being repulsed, had joined their forces and besieged Janaka in his capital, wasting the country and reducing the people to very grievous straits. This had gone on for a year, but Janaka took refuge in asceticism and prayers to the gods, with the result that they had taken pity on him and sent a great army which drove his assailants far beyond his frontiers. But his offer was still open. He invited Rāma to come and see the bow, adding that if Rāma should be able to bend it, he would give Sītā to him in marriage. The bow was placed in a large chest, laid on a chariot with eight wheels, and drawn by no less than five thousand vigorous young men. They required to put forth all their strength to move the car. As Rāma drew near to handle the bow, Janaka remarked that not only had men failed to bend it, but gods and demons as well. But what was impossible for the gods Rāma accomplished. As if it were the merest child's play, he raised it by the middle and drew the string with such force that the bow not only bent but broke in two. The breaking of the bow made such a mighty noise that the earth shook and the spectators, to the number of thousands, fell flat on the ground. The king, Vishvāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana alone kept their feet. Janaka was overwhelmed, however, with joy and wonder. Turning to Vishvāmitra he asked for permission to send messengers to Rāma's father, asking him to give consent to the marriage of his son with Sītā. When the messenger, after travelling for three days, reached Ayodhyā, Dasharatha listened to his story with the greatest pleasure, and immediately set out for the

The winning of Sita

city of Mithilā. He was accompanied by his chief ministers Vishvāmitra, Vāmadeva, Markandeya, and Javali,[1] and escorted by a great army. When the two kings met they were so pleased with each other that it was arranged that not only should Rama marry Sītā, but that Lakshmana should marry Urmilā, Sītā's sister; while Janaka's brother agreed to give his two daughters to Bharata and Shatrughna. In connexion with the marriage ceremonies, Dasharatha gave the Brāhmins four hundred thousand cows, each attended by a calf. Janaka's dowry to his daughters and nieces consisted of silver, gold, pearls and coral rings and silks, handmaidens and slaves, horses, elephants and chariots, foot-soldiers and cavalry. It should be noted that the contracting parties joined hands and walked three times round Janaka and the sacred fire. The parents of the brides enjoined upon the young bridegrooms that it was their duty to be kind and faithful to their wives. It will be remembered that when Rāma set out upon his travels with Vishvāmitra he was in his sixteenth year.

Rama's encounter with Parashurama

As Dasharatha and his sons were journeying homewards, they began to notice a great commotion among the birds and beasts of the forest. These animals cried aloud in alarm, and kept moving always to the right. The aged king asked the holy men in his company, what these inauspicious signs might portend. They replied that manifestly something unusual was about to happen. The action of the birds was distinctly discouraging, but on the other hand, the movement of larger animals indicated that their fears would ultimately be dispelled. Even as they spoke a great temptest arose, trees were hurled to the ground and the sky was darkened. At length, out of the gathering gloom, a strange figure emerged. It was Parashurāma[2],

[1] The *Mahābhārata* tells us that Mārkandeya had lived through the four ages of the world. Though thousands of years old, he looked like a man of twenty-five (see Note 5 on Dasharatha's ministers).

[2] Parashurāma, or Rāma of the axe, was one of the incarnations of the god Vishnu, even as was Rāma, son of Dasharatha. It is interesting to find the

the great enemy of the warrior caste. Clad in the garb of a devotee he bore on his shoulder the axe with which he had slain so many of his foes, while in his hands he carried a bow and arrows. Vasishtha and the other sages began to question one another. Is he about to slay these members of the Kshatriya race? Already he has shed seas of blood, will his anger never be assuaged? Anxious to appease him, they approached and offered gifts, repeating his name softly in the hope of calming his angry breast. Rāma of the axe took the gifts, but made no other response. It was with Rāma, son of Dasharatha, only that he would deal, for we find later that when the old king reminded him that he had given a solemn promise to Indra to give up blood-shed and resume his devotions, he paid no attention and continued to address Rāma. The object of his coming, as he now proceeded to explain, was as follows. He had heard the gods discussing the great exploit of Rāma, Dasharatha's son, in bending and breaking the bow of Shiva. He had now brought another bow, the bow of another god, Vishnu, which his father, Jamadagni, had formerly owned. He invited Rāma to try if he could bend it also. If he was successful, he would challenge him to single combat. He did not say what would happen if Rāma failed, but he made it quite plain that he was conferring a great honour upon Rāma in proposing a duel.

Rama recognized as greatest of all the gods

It would appear that long ago Shiva and Vishnu had met in single combat, at the instance of the god Brahmā.[1] The result of the duel was that gods and sages awarded the victory to Vishnu and recognized

two incarnations in the world at the same time. Parashurāma was born as the son of the ascetic Jamadagni, of the family of the Prajāpati Bhrigu, son of Brahmā. His mother and grandmother were the daughters of kings. He was thus of mixed Brāhmin and Kshatriya descent. His father, Jamadagni, was killed by the wicked king, Arjun-Kārta-Vīrya. Because of this murder Rāma of the axe killed every male in the Kshatriya caste. It is said that this wicked king had persecuted gods, demons and saints, and to save the world from his oppressions Vishnu had come to earth. But it must be distinctly noted that Vālmīki does not say that Parashurāma was an incarnation of Vishnu.

[1] We here have the three great gods of present day Hinduism brought together, Brahmā, the creator, Vishnu, the Preserver, and Shiva, the Destroyer.

his pre-eminence. In disgust at his defeat Shiva had given his bow to Janaka's ancestor, Devarāta. Vishnu, on the other hand, gave his to Jamadagni, the ascetic and father of Parashurāma. Parashurāma then went on to tell how his father had been treacherously slain by the wicked king Arjun-Kārta-Vīrya, and that in revenge he had never ceased to slay, from generation to generation, the members of the warrior caste.[1] When the Kshatriyas were finally subdued, he had retired to a hermitage on the mountain Mahendra. In reply to this statement about himself and about Vishnu's bow, on the part of Rāma of the Axe, Rāma, son of Dasharatha answered that he had often heard of his exploits, and tried to forget his crimes by remembering the good reasons he had for wishing to obtain revenge. Now that he was challenged he was not at all afraid to meet him, and first of all he would bend his bow. As to the subsequent duel he would be merciful and not take his life, in view of the fact that he was of the Brāhminical caste. But he was resolved to restrict his movements and take away the privilege he enjoyed of going where he liked all over the world. As Rāma was making this reply, a great company of heavenly witnesses began to gather—gods, demons, saints, snakes and spirits of the air. When Rāma took the bow of Vishnu into his hands, the world was hushed into silence and seemed to hold its breath. And even as he had bent the bow of Shiva, so did Rāma bend the bow of Vishnu. At the sight Parashurāma was filled with fear and his heart melted within him. Scarcely able to speak he told Rāma that if he would allow him to keep his privilege of wandering about at will, he would go off at once to his hermitage among the mountains and trouble him no more. He pleaded, in particular, that he might not be shut out of heaven. He acknowledged that Rāma was the greatest of all the gods. None could compete with him. It was no disgrace to confess that he had been

[1] The *Mahābhārata* says that the Brāhmins raised up children for the slain Kshatriyas by co-habiting with their widows.

subdued by one who was lord and master of the three worlds. Rāma refused to grant his prayer. He bent the bow and shot the arrow. As the arrow sped on its way, the sky grew clear, the gods and saints began to sing, and Rāma of the axe knew that he was overcome. He joined the gods in their hymns of praise, walked round the hero three times and made off as quickly as he could for his hermitage among the mountains.[1]

Dasharatha, having clapsed his eldest son to his breast in gratitude and joy for their deliverance, bade his army hasten with all speed to Ayodhyā. When they reached its gates the citizens turned out in great numbers to receive them. Flags and banners adorned the house-tops. The streets, which had been sprayed with water to lay the dust were covered with flowers. The air was filled with the sound of music. Attended by his wives and children and clothed in linen garments, the king visited the temples of the gods to offer sacrifice and thanksgiving.

[1] In this story we probably see an attempt to atone to the Kshatriyas for the indignities they had suffered at the hands of Vishnu's incarnation in Rāma of the Axe. It is, however, about as mysterious as the story in the *Mahābhārata* of Parashurāma's unsuccessful duel with Bhīshma. See Summary of *Mahābhārata*, p. 227.

Book II

Ayodhya

Rama chosen as joint ruler

Many happy years passed away. Rāma was a continual source of joy to his aged father. His one object in life was to carry out his father's commands, and to seek the welfare of his father's subjects. He was devoted to the study of the Vedas, and paid due respect to his teachers, the Brāhmins. He never spoke unkindly to anyone. He never told a falsehood. He was devoid of envy and bitterness. He kept his passions under control. He was eloquent in speech, but he never spoke for purposes of display. He had learned to estimate at their proper value the conflicting claims of virtue, profit, and pleasure.[1] He was industrious in the work of administration. He shunned anger and foolish mirth. He was an expert in horsemanship and the use of arms. He was invariably victorious over his father's enemies. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than listening, when his day's work was over, to the wisdom of his elders. He loved all men, and they returned his love. It is not to be wondered at that though Dasharatha cherished all his sons he should have set his heart, in a special degree, upon Rāma. And, realizing that death could not be far distant, he resolved to call a parliament of

[1] The conflicting claims of virtue (religion) profit (or wealth) and pleasure (or desire) are frequently discussed in the *Mahābhārata*. In the eighth book of that poem we find them personified in the remarkable story of Vishnu acting as the arrow of Shiva, and Brahmā as his charioteer. See Summary of *Mahābhārata*, p. 232.

N. B. It is also said of Rama, that 'he had attained proficiency in all the scriptures and literary works composed in both Sanskrit and Prākrit' (Bk. 2, ch. i. Dutt's Translation, p. 179). It is evident from Asoka's pillars that in the third century B. C. the language of the common people was no longer Sanskrit but Prākrit. See Monier Williams' *Indian Wisdom*, p. 313.

his people and ask them to approve of Rāma's succession to the throne. In accordance with this decision, members of the twice-born castes were duly summoned. It is said that kings and nobles came at Dasharatha's call from far distant countries. When they were all collected, Dasharatha told them that many thousands of years had fled since he first began to wield his power beneath the white umbrella and he wished, before death should call him away, to see Rāma anointed in his stead. He was willing to submit his own wishes to their judgement, as he recognized that the discussion of any subject sometimes evolved a better plan. A very brief consultation showed that his hearers unanimously approved of their king's resolve that Rāma should be appointed joint ruler. In dwelling upon his virtues, after the manner we have already recorded, they emphasized the fact that he had never been conquered by gods, men or demons, and in particular, that he had won the hearts of the people by his invariable kindness and condescension. He shared their joys and sorrows. Even as he rode through the streets he would greet the citizens, asking after their welfare and that of their households. He was the friend and father of all. Old and young, high and low, rich and poor, had only one wish. They wished that Rāma might enjoy long life, health, strength and happiness. In conclusion, they begged the king to set Rāma upon the throne. This answer gave Dasharatha great satisfaction. He called upon his ministers to make immediate preparation for Rāma's coronation on the following day. It was believed that on that day the stars would be propitious, but for some time Dasharatha had been distressed by bad dreams and evil omens, indicating either death or disaster for kings. He was anxious also to have the installation of Rāma completed in the absence of Bharata, who with his fourth son Shatrughna was absent on a visit to their uncle, the king of a neighbouring country. Bharata had always shown himself faithful and true, but the mind of man was fickle and uncertain, and one never knew what might arise.

Preparations for the coronation

The preparations within the palace grounds were on the most splendid scale, and they seem to have been got ready within twenty-four hours. Food was prepared for not less than a hundred thousand guests; gold and gems for the sacrifice, gifts for the Brāhmins and princes, were set forth in order. Seats were placed in rows for the priestly caste to sit on. The space behind them was devoted to musicians and dancing girls. Soldiers belonging to the better castes were chosen to keep guard. In the streets of the city and in the houses of the people the excitement was immense. Every lane and alley was crowded with spectators. It was almost impossible to move for the dense throng. The gaping countryman was specially noticeable, as he listened eagerly to the more informed talk of the citizens. Even little children in their play stopped to talk of Rāma and how he was to be anointed king on the coming day. There was not a tree in the town that was not decked with flags and banners. Poles also were erected and adorned with many-coloured ribbons. Lamps and lanterns were placed here and there, with a view to illumination when darkness fell. Temples, palaces, the shops of the merchant classes, every sacred tree, at all the crossings, and in the public squares, the whole city, indeed, was adorned and beautiful. Dasharatha did not fail to acquaint Rāma with his decision. He told his son that for himself he had never failed to perform any of his religious duties. He had paid all his debts to gods, Brāhmins and the spirits of the dead. But he desired that Rāma and his wife Sītā should pass the hours of darkness in fasting and prayer. This Rāma at once promised to do. Husband and wife spent the night in the temple of Vishnu Nārāyana, seated on a bed made of sacred grass, and dressed in garments of pure linen. They were attended by priests, who chanted hymns of praise and prayer.[1]

[1] It is said that Rāma recited the Gāyatri verse addressed to Savitri, the sun, 'the most sacred thing in all the Vedas.' Dutt, p. 196.

But the powers of evil were soon to be triumphant and sweep their hymns and prayers away. Queen Kaikeyi, the mother of Bharata, Dasharatha's second son, had a slave-girl in her service, a wretched hunch-back, called Mantharā. This woman, seeing the preparations and hearing that they were for Rāma's installation, hurried to the queen and roused her from sleep. She told her that her days of power were at an end. Everyone knew that Dasharatha loved her more than either of his other queens. But with Rāma on the throne all would be changed. Rāma's mother Kausalyā would reign supreme. Her arguments at first made no impression on Kaikeyi. Indeed the queen declared that she loved and trusted Rāma, who, in turn, loved her more than he did his own mother. This answer roused the hunch-back to fury, and she redoubled her arguments, declaring that it was cunning which made the king send Bharata on a visit to his uncle, and that when Rāma was on the throne, he would, of a certainty, put both Bharata and his brother Shatrughna to death. In this way the hunch-back at last won Kaikeyi to look at matters as she did, and when she was fully persuaded reminded her how in ancient days when the gods and demons were at war she had rendered a service to the king. Dasharatha, it appears, had gone to the help of the gods, been wounded in battle, and rescued by Kaikeyi. In gratitude he had told her to ask for boons. These boons she had never yet preferred. Now was her opportunity. Let her ask for them now, bind the king by the strongest oaths to grant them before he knew what they were. And, having received his solemn promise, demand that Rāma's coronation be stayed, her own son Bharata chosen in his place, and Rāma sent into exile for the space of fourteen years. At the end of that time Bharata would be so firmly established on the throne that not even Rāma would be able to prevail against him. Thus persuaded Kaikeyi hurried to the sulking room to await the hour when

The plot against Rama

Dasharatha, the work of the day over, would according to his custom seek her society. Kaikeyi was now so eager and full of gratitude to her adviser that she began to shower compliments upon her, told her that she was very beautiful, that no one could find a flaw in her lovely form, that even her hump was a thing of beauty, and gave her many gifts. It was not long before Dasharatha came seeking the queen. When he heard that she had gone to the sulking room, he grew very anxious. He was still more perturbed when he found the lady lying on the ground, her jewels and lovely garments all scattered around. He asked if she was ill, and said he would bring the court physician at once; he wondered if some evil spirit or wicked person had cast his spells upon her; he declared that if any one had grieved her, he would have the guilty person put to instant death; he would bring down the richest and proudest man his realm; he would exalt the poorest and the most degraded at her slightest word. He was lord of all the earth. Its riches were at her disposal, all that he had was hers, if she would only tell him the secret of her grief. The infatuated king went on pleading, assuring the queen that she had only to speak, and all her troubles would melt away, like frost before the sun. To these repeated appeals, Kaikeyi at last condescended to reply. She said that she would reveal the secret of her grief if Dasharatha first promised to grant her prayer. To this the king answered that she knew how much he loved her, loved her best of all his queens, loved her more than all beside, save Rāma, and by Rāma, he swore that he would grant her request, however hard and difficult it might prove to be. But even Rāma's name was not enough for Kaikeyi. She made him swear by the Thirty Three gods, by the sun and moon and stars, by the earth and sky, by day and night, by saints and devils, by the spirits of the dead, and the household deities. She made him swear by everything that had life, however small, that he would not go back upon his word. Having pledged him thus, she reminded

him of how he had told her long years before, when she had succoured him on the battlefield, to ask two boons. These boons she now put forward and they were that the coronation rites begun for Rāma should be completed on behalf of Bharata, while Rāma should, before the close of another day, be sent into exile as a hermit for the space of fourteen years.

The sorrow of Dasharatha

Words cannot describe the grief of Dasharatha, when Kaikeyi claimed her boon. He cast himself upon the ground, heaving heavy sighs. He fainted more than once. He raged and stormed at the queen, calling her a poisonous snake in human form; sent by some evil fate, to wreck for ever the ancient empire of his race. He asked her how she, who all her life had been so blameless, should now seek evil rather than good. He knelt in the dust before her and grovelled at her feet. Passing from anger to the tenderest pleading, he called her his best-loved queen, told her that she had often said that Rāma loved her better than her own Bharata did, and that she returned his love. He dwelt on Rāma's virtues. No breath of scandal had ever touched his name. He was the joy and pride of the people, honoured and loved by his teachers, for his kindness piety and truthfulness. She must not think that she and Bharata would long enjoy the sweets of empire. The country would soon fall into confusion and decay. He asked her to think of the people's scorn for himself, if he yielded to a woman's wiles. They would call him a seller of children. He would be held in as great dishonour as a drunken Brāhmin. Surely he had committed some great crime, else the fates could not have doomed him to such awful pain. He pleaded with her to recall the boons. He would die the very moment Rāma went into exile, and he swore that, if Bharata consented to be a king, he would not be allowed to perform the funeral ceremonies for his departed sire. He denounced all womenkind. And

yet again, he tried to touch her woman's heart by picturing Rāma in the woods, living on hermit's fare and sleeping on the ground, he who fed upon the daintiest food, and wore the softest and most costly of raiment. To all these entreaties the queen was adamant. She told her lord that he had sworn by all the gods that he would grant her boons. She had presented them and he must keep his word. He had always boasted of his loyalty to truth. Now was the time to prove that he had boasted truly. She reminded him of king Shivi,[1] who was willing to give his life to a pigeon he had promised to protect, and of the ocean, that according to promise never transgresses his appointed mark. The king could give what name he chose to her demand. It might be just or it might be unjust, good or bad. He had made a promise, and confirmed it by the most solemn oaths. If he did not do what she asked, if Rāma had not departed for the woods before another sun had set, she would take poison and die. She ended by moralising on the greatness of truth. All justice, human and divine, was founded on truth. The essence of all religion was truth. A life based on truth was the only life that achieved eternal happiness.

Rama sent for

The night passed away in pleadings and reproaches. With the morning light, the cunning queen, afraid that Dasharatha would refuse to keep his promise, contrived to suggest that he should send for Rāma. Knowing his great hatred for every kind of falsehood and deceit, she was sure that Rāma would insist on carrying out his father's pledge. It so happened that just at that moment, Vasishtha, the king's principal minister, approached the palace and asked a brother counsellor to tell their master that everything was now ready for the coronation of the prince. The details which he gave are very interesting, golden vessels full of water from the

[1] See Summary of the *Mahābhārata*, p. 232, for the story of the king Shivi.

Ganges and other sacred streams[1]; a throne made of the wood of the fig tree; every variety of scents and seeds, gems and ornaments; grain, sacred grass, vegetables and flowers, curds, honey, milk and oil; elephants, a car with four horses; a bow and a sword; a litter with attendants; a white umbrella; chowries or fly-whisks, made of the whitest hair; a beautiful bull, with a high hump; a throne set upon carved lions as its support; a tiger skin and the sacred fire; eight beautiful maidens, dancing-girls and musicians, cows and Brāhmins; sacred birds and beasts, kings, princes, nobles, and members of the third caste. When the messenger entered the king's presence, he joined his palms together and prayed that the gods, Shiva, Agni, Kuvera, Varuna, Indra, the Sun and Moon might crown him with every blessing, on that auspicious day, which would make Rāma partner of his father's throne. He added that a kingdom without a king was like an army without a general, and like sheep without a shepherd. When Dasharatha's only answer to these observations was a sigh, the wicked queen told the minister that her husband had been so filled with happiness that he could not sleep all night, and was now overcome with exhaustion. All the same, he was possessed with a strong desire to see Rāma at once, and she begged the minister to go and tell the prince to come without delay. This request was seconded by Dasharatha, who roused himself to speak at last. The minister hastened to obey. Rāma's palace stood in another quarter of the town. It was a place of great magnificence and beauty. It is compared to the mansions of Indra. It was adorned with a hundred porches, porticoes studded with gems and coral and statues of gold. Its walls were lined with sandal wood, filling every part with a rich and lovely odour. At the entrance great crowds of country people were waiting to offer gifts. The ante-chamber of the prince was filled with minstrels and bards, whose

[1] The water of the Ganges was taken from the place where that river unites with the Jumna, still held specially sacred by Hindus.

duty it was to pass the time singing his praises, or, when he desired to rest, soothing him to sleep. When Rāma received his father's summons, he at once mounted his royal car. He was accompanied by Lakshmana and a great retinue. Before he left he made Sītā a loving farewell. She, confident that her husband would return a king, prayed that the gods might guard him from all danger and pour down upon him every blessing. The streets were thronged with people. Every lattice was crowded with women. Surely, they cried, no one is so happy as Rāma's mother is to-day. She must be reaping in this life the fruit of merit acquired in a former birth. Those who failed to see Rāma that morning, were full of self-reproach. Those who saw him, yet failed to win his notice, were equally distressed. All classes of the people loved him, because he was kind to all. As he passed through the city, Rāma paid due reverence to the gods. He made a circuit of every temple and altar. Wherever two roads met, wherever there was a sacred tree, he went through an act of worship. Reaching his father's house at last, the prince clasped his father's feet, nor did he forget to pay the same respect to his step-mother. The old man's eyes filled with tears, and overcome with shame and sorrow, he turned his gaze upon the ground. He tried to speak more than once, but sobs and groans choked his utterance. He was like the sea, in a storm, striving in vain to overpass his appointed limits, like the sun during an eclipse, like a saint who has told a lie and is filled with shame and penitence. A great fear seized upon Rāma, and turning to the queen, he asked her to solve the riddle. If he was angry, could she tell him why? Was he ill? Men never knew the moment when their highest joy was turned to pain; unalloyed happiness was difficult to attain in this transitory world; had anything happened to Bharata and his brothers, or to any of the queens? For himself, if he had done anything to offend, he desired to live not a moment longer. A man's father was his god. In his anxiety to find a cause, he even

asked Kaikeyi if she herself had said or done anything to grieve her husband. To all this the queen replied that there was one thing and one thing alone that troubled the king. He was not ill. He was not angry. Out of love for Rāma he was afraid to speak. He had made the most solemn of all promises. He had sworn to grant her a boon, and having heard what it was, feeling that it would occasion pain to Rāma, he wished to go back upon his word. It would be most improper for the king to act so falsely. All well-behaved people knew, that loyalty to truth was the fountainhead of all the virtues and all religious merit. She therefore called upon Rāma to see to it, that his father kept his promise. She would not say what the matter was, till Rāma swore to carry it out, whatever the consequences might be.

Rama exiled to the woods

Grieved to think that she could doubt him, Rāma answered that he would drink poison, give his body to be burned, cast himself into the sea, if his father ordered him to do so. Let her say at once what it was. It was not his practice to promise twice. The ruthless woman then repeated her story of the boons Dasharatha had granted long ago. Only the night before had she preferred the boons. She asked that they be granted now; that Bharata be anointed with all the pomp and circumstance that would have attended the coronation of Rāma, and that Rāma, that very day, go to Dandaka forest for fourteen years and live the life of a hermit there. As these cruel demands were thus declared once more, the old king broke forth in a fresh agony of tears. But Rāma listened to them quite unmoved. He told the queen that he would set out at once, after bidding farewell to his wife and mother. He would gladly yield all that was his to a brother so well beloved as Bharata, his wife and wealth, his life itself, without being asked. How much more willingly, when his father bade him do so. One thing only grieved him, that his father had not announced his decision with his own lips. But Kaikeyi was anxious

to see him go. She told him indeed that the sooner he went the better. His father would not bathe or eat bread till he had left the capital. She therefore begged the prince to excuse his father's silence. If it was shame that made him hold his peace, it was a small matter for a son to make so much of. These cruel words were too much for Dasharatha, and he fell in a swoon upon the bed. When Rāma sought to raise his father in his arms, the wicked woman lashed him with her tongue, and called upon him to be gone. Once more touching his father's feet in reverence, as also the feet of the queen, so unworthy to receive his courtesy, Rāma, having walked round the couch, on which his father lay, departed from the palace. The loss of wealth and worldly power did not move him. No one could have told from his face that anything had happened. But he dismissed his chariot and his retinue, and bade his friends and the accompanying citizens farewell. His first duty was to visit his mother, and tell her the sad news, which would shatter all her hopes and happiness.

Rama visits his mother

Rāma walked on foot to the palace, where his mother dwelt. Its courts were crowded by Kausalyā's own particular followers, from the Brāhmins and sages, deeply versed in Vedic lore, before whom Rāma meekly bowed, to elderly ladies and maidens, who lived in her more immediate presence. All of these were full of the most joyful expectation. Kausalyā herself, had been spending the night in watching and prayer. Clad in spotless linen, she had made special offerings in the temple of Vishnu. Indeed when the prince arrived, he found his mother feeding the holy fire and making libations to Lakshmi, the goddess of good fortune. When she saw her son, she ran to him, as a mare does to her wandering foal. She took him in her arms and kissed his head, praying that the royal rule, which that day would become his, might bring him fame and glory, like that of his ancient sires. She brought him food and urged him to sit down. But Rāma refused, and

without delay told his mother that royal couches and the flesh of animals were not for him. That day he must set out for the forest. He was to be an exile for fourteen years, and Bharata was to reign in his stead. At these words Kausalyā fell fainting to the ground, like some goddess hurled from heaven. When Rāma took her in his arms, the poor queen recovered consciousness. She told her son, that it would have been better if he had never been born. When her husband neglected her, and she had failed in her efforts to win his love, Rāma's birth had been her consolation and she had centred all her hopes and thoughts in him. Happiness would be hers again when she would be the mother of a king. But now alas, with Rāma in the forest, she would not be able to endure the insults and scorn which her rival queens would heap upon her. She was first in dignity of birth, she was the senior queen, and yet they had not sought to conceal their contempt, even when Rāma was near. Old age loneliness and sorrow were now her portion. Her one desire was to die and be at rest. But she knew that Fate would not hasten by a single hour the day of her departure for the abodes of death. It was manifest, and this added to her grief, that fasting and prayer, gifts and vows were all useless. Heaven did not hear the cry of the suppliant. She had asked for a son. The childless woman always prayed for that, and forgot that the sorrow involved in being robbed of her children was greater than that of having none at all.

Lakshmana proposes to disobey their father

Lakshmana, who was in attendance on his brother during these events, was not at all prepared to yield obedience to his father's pledge. He declared that Dasharatha was in his dotage, and said that if Bharata ventured to claim the throne or was supported by any of the citizens, there would be civil war, and the streets of Ahodhyā would run with blood. Meekness did not pay, and he swore by all the gods, by prayer and sacrifice and gifts, that if need arose

he would kill his father. These argument were seconded by Kausalyā. Rāma was devoted to virtue. He made much of the claims of duty. But she held that it was the highest duty to disobey so foolish a sentence as his father had passed. A mother had an equal claim on her son's obedience. If Rāma's exile would be followed by her death, he would thus be guilty of killing his own mother. Matricide was held to be as great a crime as killing a Brāhmin. Everyone knew that the Sea was condemned to endure the pains of hell for giving pain to his mother, while the rishi Kashyapa was made a god, because of the great reverence he paid to his mother. In reply, Rāma produced even weightier examples. He told of Kandu, who killed a cow, of Sagara's sixty thousand sons who destroyed innumerable creatures, of Parashurāma, who slew his own mother, and in each case the all-sufficient justification was, that their fathers had given them an order to do so. There were many more cases he could cite, if it were necessary. They must realize that in no circumstances, would he disobey his father's command. He appealed to Lakshmana to abandon his bloody resolve, and not to forsake what was man's highest study, obedience to parents and Brāhmins. Human beings had three objects in life, pleasure, profit and duty. Those who were evil disposed set their hearts on pleasure and profit. It was all the more necessary for the virtuous to seek duty first of all. Life was short, and even to obtain empire over the whole earth he would not forsake the path of duty. He therefore urged his brother to assist, with cordiality, in the coronation rites of Bharata, do all he could to ease their father's anxiety and sorrow, and to lighten the burden of his mother's pain. In the generosity of his heart, he even pictured Kaikeyi, full of gladness at the thought of her son's accession to the throne and expressed his conviction that she was not to be blamed. Fate was lord and responsible for all that had happened. Kaikeyi was but an instrument in the hand of that great inscrutable power. The queen had always loved

him, and when she spoke so cruelly the night before, she spoke the words that Fate put into her heart. How otherwise could a lady of royal birth be acquainted with words of slander and abuse, known only to women of the lowest caste. From the moment of birth to the hour of death, our joys and sorrows, our losses and gains, were under Fate's control, subject to the things we had done in a former birth. Even the saint, engaged in the strictest devotion, would suddenly forsake his vows, and fall a victim to his evil passions and the power of anger, not because he loved these things, but because Fate willed it. And for them also, Fate had interposed, when they were at the very summit of their happiness, and without pity cast them down. In the hour of calamity he was the wise man who refused to indulge in useless grief, and kept a brave and a steadfast heart.

Lakshmana defies Fate

These arguments only made Lakshmana more angry than before. He declared that Rāma had been far too hasty. It was exceedingly foolish to promise that he would carry out his father's pledge. Dasharatha and Kaikeyi had plotted deceitfully. When they professed to love him, it was all a vain show. The boon had been granted to Kaikeyi many years before. She had refrained from asking its fulfilment till it suited her purpose. If it was right to obey a command so cruelly unjust and so repugnant to the will of the people, then he had no respect for what was right. In particular, he objected to what Rāma said about Fate. It was the argument and the excuse of the coward. But supposing Fate was responsible, then he defied Fate to do its worst. Brave men were not afraid of Fate. They refused to yield, and he would do so also. He would show that human exertion and courage could prevail.[1] The citizens had seen the

[1] See Summary of *Mahābhārata* for interesting discussions on the relative strength of Fate and Human Effort. pp. 15, 105, 107, 126, 149, 184; also the wise words of Manu, 'No man can say what has been appointed to happen in this world, but it lies with every one to do the best he can.'
(*Laws of Manu*, p. 73.)

coronation rites stopped by Fate. They would see Fate arrested and the rites resumed. He challenged every power in heaven, earth and hell, to hinder him. If he was not afraid of the gods, why should he fear the king and Kaikeyi. He would send *them* to the forests for fourteen years. That would tame their pride, and cool their ambitions for Bharata. As for Rāma, after a thousand years had passed, when he was an old man, and had sons to succeed him on the throne, he could, if he chose, retire to the forest, like so many of his ancestors, and pass his declining days in the practice of devotion. That was his advice and, if Rāma refused to listen and went to the woods, he would seize the kingdom himself and rule it in his brother's absence. Should any one resist him, he swore that he would fight them to the uttermost, and prayed that he might never enter heaven, if he did not strew the earth with the severed limbs of his enemies.

Kausalya calmed

When Kausalyā saw that their entreaties were of no avail, she declared that it was her purpose to accompany her son into exile. She spoke with great tenderness of the days, when with fasting and prayer, and sacrifice, she had persuaded the gods to grant her a child, and asked how he could live on woodland fare, when his servants and slaves had always fed upon the finest of wheat. This proposal to accompany him into exile greatly shocked Rāma, and he pointed out to his mother, that if she abandoned her husband, he would be sure to die. She knew as well as he did what both the Scriptures and Tradition taught concerning a wife's duty.[1] A woman's husband was her god. Even though she paid no worship to the heavenly powers, obedience to the wishes of her lord transferred her at death to heaven. On the other hand, no amount of religious asceticism and devotion would ever compensate for disobedience and neglect.

1 The *Vedas and Smritis*. Dutt's translation, p. 262.
The Vedas are Shruti or Revelation; what has been *heard*.
The Smritis are Tradition, what has been *remembered*.

His mother must remain at home, devote herself to comforting his father, make offerings to the gods, and pay respect to Brāhmins. She might have every confidence that Bharata would care for her, and pay her due respect. Every day would bring the end of his banishment nearer and hasten the renewal of their happiness. To this appeal Kausalyā responded by not only withdrawing her opposition, but by bidding him obey the commands of Fate. She put her fears and griefs aside, and prayed that every blessing might attend her son and keep him from all harm. Virāj,[1] Brahmā, Shiva, Indra, the Sun and Moon, Brihaspati, Varuna, Shukra, Yama and all the gods, the rishi Nārada and the seven rishis who dwell in the seven stars of the great Bear constellation, the sky, the wind, rocks, mountains, lakes and altars, everything that moves and everything that is immovable, even the demons were appealed to, and he was bidden not to fear either giants or Rākshasas. Scorpions and gnats, flies and creeping things, tigers, elephants, buffaloes and other wild beasts would be harmless before him as the result of the earnestness and constancy of her prayers. With the assistance of a Brāhmin, to whom she gave handsome gifts, she next poured oil upon the sacred fire and distributed honey, curds and grain among members of the twice-born castes.

Rama goes to Sita

Having said farewell to his mother, Rāma had yet another hard task to accomplish. He had to tell Sītā, his darling wife, of the fate that was in store for him. His interview with Kausalyā had left its marks upon his face, and as he entered the room where Sītā was, she realized at once that something terrible had happened. And great though his grief had been at parting with

[1] Manu says that Purusha, 'the first male was called Brahmā, and was produced from the Supreme self-existent Spirit'. He also says that Brahmā, having divided his own substance, became half male, half female, and that from the female was produced Virāj, and that from Virāj was born Manu—the secondary progenitor and producer of all beings. The Purusha-sukta of the Rig-Veda, says: 'From him called Purusha was born Virāj, and from Virāj was Purusha produced. See *Indian Wisdom* (Monier Williams) p. 22. Also *The Laws of Manu*, pp. 18, 19.

his mother, his grief was still greater at the thought of parting with his wife. Sītā sprang to her feet and asked her husband why he was so sad, on a day that was to bring them so much joy, and when stars and moon were all favourable. But even as she spoke she saw that her husband was alone. He was accompanied by no Brāhmins pouring honey and curds upon his head. His chariots and horses, and elephants, the retinue with which he had set out a few hours before, the headmen of the different trades, the cheering multitudes that had thronged the streets and crowded his courts, she realized that they were absent, and that a great silence reigned. Great beads of perspiration broke out upon his forehead and his face was drawn with pain, as Rāma repeated the story of Kaikeyi's boons. Never dreaming that Sītā would propose to go with him into exile, Rāma told her how to conduct herself in his absence. She was to remember that Bharata was both her king and his. She must never do or say anything that would cause him pain. She must especially bear in mind not to sing his praises in Bharata's presence. Kings never liked to hear anybody else praised. She must therefore not only obey his commands, but endeavour, by a meek and quiet spirit, to secure his approval. She was to rise at sunrise every morning; live a spotless life, attend to her religious duties, fasting, prayer, and worship; and pay reverence to his father and mother and to the other queens.

Sita says she too will go to the forest

These injunctions stirred Sītā to loving indignation. She asked her husband what she had done to earn his scorn. She told him that he spoke in ignorance of what a wife's duties were. The sentence of exile affected them both. A wife could not leave her husband. There was no refuge, no safety for her, except in his society. He could not commit her to the care of anyone else. She was going with him, rather she would go before him in the pathless forest, treading down the grass and thorns that would

impede his progress. If he had any doubts, or was angry at what she said, it mattered not. Doubts and anger were like dirty water, fit only to be cast away. Her parents had taught her well, and she knew where a wife's place was. It was beside her husband. The forest, with him, was better than a palace or heaven itself without him. She had nothing to fear. Neither wild beasts nor savage men could hurt her with Rāma to protect her. How happy they would be in the forest, bathing in the cool springs of water, feeding on fruit and honey, gazing their fill on mountains, stream and sea! Was it only fourteen years of exile? A thousand years would pass like a single day. She would not exchange the happy prospect for a place beside the gods. He need not worry as far as she was concerned. She cared for nobody and for nothing, apart from him, and if he did not take her with him, she would die. Rāma used all his powers of persuasion to shake Sītā's pious resolve. He called it foolishness, and pictured eloquently all the trials and dangers of a forest life; repeating over and over again, the refrain 'The wood, my love, is full of woes.' He knew nothing of the joys she had been describing. The roaring of the rivers was as terrible as the roar of the tigers. The crossing of a stream was full of danger. If a man was not drowned, he was eaten by crocodiles. As for the fruits she spoke of, one had to be content with what the wind shook from the trees. Sleep was almost impossible, because of the multitude of creeping things. There were flies, scorpions, grasshoppers, not to speak of snakes, without number. Beds of leaves afforded little comfort. While the gathering of forest flowers as an offering to the gods, as well as the unremitting attention they must give, not only to religious rites, fasting and prayer, but to hermits and guests, would prove a grievous burden. Both night and day, they would be encompassed by fears. To these arguments Sītā turned a deaf ear. She said her pain would be turned to joy when Rāma was with her. The wild beasts would flee when they saw him. The

mightiest gods could do her no harm. He had said enough and he must argue no more. She was afraid of nothing, but separation from her love. She could not and would not live without him. Besides, a Brāhmin in her father's house, in the days before she was married, had declared that her fortune would be to live some day in the forest, and she had always looked forward to the experience. The woodland had no terrors for those who kept their senses under control. Indeed she had often prayed for the fulfilment of the prophecy. It would mean the purifying of her soul, the deliverance of her heart from sin. Her husband, she repeated, was her god, and learned Brāhmins declared that a wife was a wife both here and hereafter. At that, she began to weep, and said, 'Take me with you to the forest. If you refuse, I shall drink poison, or drown myself or seek my death on the funeral pyre.' Deeply touched by his wife's loving enthusiasm, Rāma tried to soothe her by every means in his power, but as he still refused to hear her prayer, she broke forth in another impassioned appeal. She asked if he was really a man or only a woman in disguise. What was he afraid of? Did he remember what pains Sāvitri[1] endured to win back her husband from the grasp of death? Did he think her a woman of low birth, that he committed her to the care of another man? Even in imagination she did not wish to look upon anyone's face but his. She once more declared that the roughest path would be like velvet to her feet, that thorns and briers would be robbed of their sting, that the flying dust would be as sweet and fragrant as sandal-wood, that whether she ate much or little of woodland fare, it would be as delightful to her as the drink of the gods. She would never long for the luxuries and comfort of a palace. When he was with her, she would be in heaven. When he was absent, she would be in hell.

With this last appeal Sītā cast her arms about her husband's neck and swooned away. When he pressed her to his breast, the princess revived and she knew

[1] See Summary of *Mahābhārata* for the story of Sāvitrī, pp. 20, 93.

that she had conquered. Rāma assured her that he would take her with him into exile. It was the greatness of his love for her that had made him so unwilling to consent. He never knew till that hour how much she loved him, nor had he appreciated the greatness of her soul. He was not afraid of anything that might be in store for them. He was as free from fear as Brahmā himself. In every extremity he would be her shield and protector. He deplored the necessity but he must pay the triple debt that was due to his parents and to his religious instructor. Religious observances and the making of gifts were not so powerful in securing entrance to heaven as filial obedience. He prayed that in the coming years she might always show the same noble spirit, whatever their lot in life might be. Now that he had consented to her going with him they must prepare to do so immediately. And before they went they must gather all their wealth together and distribute it among the Brāhmins and their friends.

Rama consents

A later canto tells in detail how this wealth was distributed. Vasishtha, the king's minister, received rings, pearls and bracelets of great price, beds adorned with gold and gems, a thousand golden coins, and Rāma's own elephant. Agastya [1] and Vishvāmitra are said to have been treated with similar generosity, but special mention is made of women slaves, one thousand cows, rich robes and a highly ornamented chariot. Rāma says of the grammarians that these individuals in their devotion to study cared nothing for fine food, and always earned the praise of the godly. He presented them, nevertheless, with one thousand bulls, one thousand cows, two hundred elephants, and eighty chariots full of treasure. The Brāhmins who were in attendance at his mother's court each received one thousand pieces of gold.[2] A great pile of what remained,

Rama distributes his wealth

[1] It is strange to find Agastya here, as he appears later living as a hermit life in Central India, not far from the Godāvarí.

[2] It is said that the gifts to the Brāhmins included 'pleasant toys.' Dutt's translation, p. 279.

gems, silver and gold was divided among their friends, the poor and members of the twice-born castes. When the work of distribution was almost completed, a working Brāhmin, who earned his living at agriculture, came to Rāma, asking for help. Clothed in rags, the old man, whose name was Trijat, told the prince that he had a large family of children and found it very hard to meet their wants. Rāma replied that he had still one thousand cows left and would give him all those that grazed within the distance to which he could throw his staff. The Brāhmin put forth all his strength, and threw his staff to a great distance, to the other bank of the Sarju river. This involved presenting Trijat with many thousands of animals and the poet does not explain how this was possible. He simply states that Rāma told the herdsmen to drive the animals to the old man's cottage and to remain in his service. It was his wish to present not only the herds but the herdsmen to the happy suppliant.

Lakshmana also goes into exile

We have seen how Lakshmana declared that if Rāma went to the forest, he would seize the kingdom himself and rule it in his brother's absence. When he saw Sītā granted permission to accompany her husband, however, he underwent a complete change of heart. Clasping his brother's feet, and weeping copiously, he declared that he could not live if he was not allowed to share their exile. He would cut their way through the pathless forest, he would gather the food they required, he would guard them by night and by day. Rāma, forgetting what he had said before in Bharata's praise, argued in reply, that if Lakshmana also went into the forest, their mothers would suffer neglect at the hand of Bharata. But Lakshmana was sure that Bharata would pay them every attention and care for them lovingly. If he did not, they would put him to death, when their exile was over. In any case, Kausalyā had ample means at her disposal, endowed, as she was, with the revenue

of one thousand wealthy villages. Manifestly Rāma was not unwilling to have his brother's society. He protested no further, and gladly gave his consent. But time was pressing. He therefore urged Lakshmana to go at once and say good-bye to his friends. In particular, he told him to bring two bows which had been given to Sītā's father by the god Varuna, quivers full of arrows, coats of mail and swords, which shone like the sun. All these weapons were of divine origin, and had been entrusted to the care of a Brāhmin.

Thus equipped, Rāma, Sītā and Lakshmana set out on foot for the palace of the king. By this time, the whole city had become aware of the approaching calamity. The streets, the roofs and windows of the houses were thronged with weeping multitudes. In particular they deplored Sītā's hard fate, a lady, gently nurtured, whose face had been so carefully veiled that even the spirits of the air had never seen it, was now walking through the public streets and seen by all. As they dwelt on Rāma's virtues and Kaikeyi's cruelty, they grew more and more indignant. At last they resolved to abandon the city, their houses and temples, and go forth in a body with the exiles into the forest. They pictured their empty homes over-run with rats, walls and doors yielding to decay, the temples unswept and uncared for, with no one to offer incense, or chant the Vedas and utter prayers. The woods would be thickly inhabited while Kaikeyi and Bharata would reign over an empty capital and a deserted kingdom. When Rāma got to the palace and approached his father, the old man ran to take him in his arms. The effort was too much for him and he fell fainting to the ground. On recovering consciousness, he pleaded with his son to wait for one more day. Rāma replied that it was impossible as he had already received Kaikeyi's commands and had promised obedience. He hoped his father would reign for another thousand years, and bade him comfort himself with the thought that in the short space of fourteen years, his exile

Rama bids farewell to his father

would be over, and they would be re-united once more. The old king yielded a feeble consent. But two of the king's ministers, Sumantra and Siddhārth, thinking that something might yet be possible, attacked Kaikeyi with mingled reproaches and appeals. The former assured her that she had been guilty of the greatest of all possible sins. He could not understand why the earth did not engulf her, nor why the sainted Brāhmins did not destroy her with a curse. A woman's first duty was to love her husband and do nothing that would cause him grief. A wife, faithful to this primary duty, was more esteemed than a woman who presented her husband with ten million sons. But it was plain that she was her mother's daughter. All the world knew what a wicked woman her mother had been. On the advice of a hermit, her husband had turned her out of his house and, in consequence, been a happy man ever afterwards. It was an old saying, and a very true one, that daughters took after their mothers, and sons after their fathers. You might water and tend the Neem tree, with every care and attention, its bitterness never changed. Nothing could make it sweet and pleasant to the taste. He was of the same mind as the citizens, declaring that nobody would stay in the capital, if Rāma was exiled. The other minister spoke in the same strain, and proposed that they get ready their cars, horses and elephants, at once, and make arrangements for the shopkeepers, storytellers and dancing girls to accompany them. The prime minister, Vasishtha also briefly interposed. He told Kaikeyi that he did not believe that Bharata would consent to reign over the kingdom on terms so unjust to Rāma; and that he would be so angry with her, that he would refuse to live with her. As to the proposed emigration, he cordially supported it. He was convinced that out of love to Rāma, the birds of the air and the beasts of the field would join the procession and set out for the forest. It was only the fact that they were so firmly fixed in the soil that would prevent the trees of Ayodhyā from going also.

Appeals to her better nature failed to soften Kaikeyi's heart. But the threats of emigration filled her with alarm, and she told Dasharatha, that the departure of the citizens would be a distinct breach of his pledge. It was not an empty kingdom that he had promised to Bharata, nor a peopled wilderness that was appointed to Rāma. But she need have had no fear. Rāma himself interposed and told his father that his commands would be obeyed, in both the letter and the spirit. He was going to the forest to live really and truly the life of a hermit. He would take no wealth; he would indulge in no comforts. He only wanted a basket and a spade. These and clothes of bark, to cover their nakedness, were all that they required. When Rāma spoke of clothes of bark, the shameless queen, who was ready for all emergencies, at once produced the necessary garments, and with a face of brass, called upon Rāma, Lakshmana and Sītā to put them on, without more delay. Sītā's hands trembled so much, as she sought to obey this cruel demand, that her husband had to come to her help and fasten the hermit garb over her royal robes. The whole scene filled the people with anger and sadness, and they called out shame upon the king. They were particularly impressed by seeing Sītā wearing clothes that made her look like a widow. The people's protest and the sight of his favourite daughter-in-law thus meanly clad, produced more convulsive fits for the old king. He declared that Kaikeyi was the worst of women and said that she would go to hell. For himself, he was certain that he was reaping the fruit of his sins. He had often killed animals needlessly, and in particular robbed many cows of their calves. But the next moment he scoffingly spoke of the rewards which, according to Scripture, are in store for the virtuous, and asked if this was one of them, to be sent into exile by one's own flesh and blood.

Kaikeyi demands her bond

Tears and entreaties were all in vain, Kaikeyi would not yield; Rāma refused to break his father's

pledge. The longer he waited, the harder it would be to say good-bye. Dasharatha had three hundred and fifty wives in addition to the queens we have already heard of. To these ladies Rāma paid a courteous farewell. He asked them to forgive him, if on any occasion he had spoken disrespectfully or hurt their feelings. In parting with Sītā, Kausalyā reminded her daughter-in-law of her duties as a wife. In doing so, she expressed her conviction that young wives were ungrateful, fickle and false, given to sinful thoughts, and impatient of control. The high birth and noble deeds of their husbands were as nothing in their eyes. They might lavish affection and gifts, but nothing could win their wandering hearts. After years of happiness and peace everything was forgotten in the presence of some slight affliction or adversity. She admitted, however, that there were women of another sort, and she hoped that Sītā would imitate them. The Sacred Books and the laws of men ordained that for a woman there is nothing so sacred in all the world as her wedded lord. In prosperity and adversity a woman's husband was her god. These observations wounded the tender heart of Sītā, and she expressed the hope that her mother-in-law was not including her in the roll of such unworthy females. A woman without a husband was a cart without a wheel, a lute without a string. A wife might have a hundred sons. Her father, her brother, her children might be devoted to her. They could never compensate for the loss of a husband. She knew her duty, and she paid reverent obedience to the commands of Holy Writ. Her husband was her god, and she would act in accordance with her beliefs.

Rama departs

Dasharatha insisted that the exiles should travel in a chariot, until they reached the confines of his kingdom. They were followed by weeping multitudes, who appealed to the charioteer to bring his horses to a halt, or at least to drive slowly. The old king

Universal sorrow

joined in the appeals, and when the driver hesitated, Rāma ordered him not to listen, saying that if his father reproached him afterwards, he could say that he had not heard him. The dust raised by the wheels of the chariot was laid immediately by the tears that flowed from the eyes of the people. Creation joined in the universal sorrow. Horses neighed and elephants roared, cows refused to let their calves drink. The sun and stars ceased to shine. Meteors swept across the sky, and baleful omens were seen on every hand. When Kaikeyi tried to approach the king, she discovered that her power was at an end. He sternly ordered her to depart from his presence, and said that she would never look upon his face again. Blinded with sorrow, he groped his way to the apartments of Kausalyā, Rāma's mother, whom he had so long neglected. That lady fed his anger with fresh invectives on Kaikeyi, while she pictured anew the sorrows which her darling son must undergo. Happily for herself she looked beyond the immediate future and pictured the happy day when Ayodhyā would welcome the exiles return. In that hope, however, Dasharatha refused to share, persuaded that the hour of death for him was near at hand. Of one thing both were certain, that in a former life, they had failed to give calves the share in their mothers' milk which was their due.[1]

The whole city follows Rama

Meanwhile, practically the whole population of Ayodhyā continued to follow the exiles. Overcome by their affection and out of regard for the aged Brāhmins, who hurried painfully along, Rāma descended from his chariot and walked with them, but while continuing his course he did all he could to persuade them to return. He dwelt at length on the virtues of his brother, Bharata, and urged them to obey him heartily, confident that he would prove a wise and gracious king. The Brāhmins replied that they had brought

[1] Kausalyā said that she had cut off the cows' paps and thus prevented their calves hungering after their mother's milk from drinking it (ii. 43.), Dutt's translation, p. 313.

with them their altar fires, and that they would not return to Ayodhyā until he did. They cast themselves in the dust before him and begged him to go back. They asked him to look and see how the very birds of the air were sitting listless and sad, refusing to eat, refusing to fly. They asked him to listen to the trees, moaning and lamenting to the wind that their roots, which bound them so firmly to the soil, would not allow them to follow the exiles. To these tender arguments, Rāma made no reply. They had by this time reached the banks of the river Tamasā and darkness had begun to fall. Exhausted by sorrow and the unwonted physical exercise, the whole body of citizens lay down on the ground and were soon fast asleep. When the sun rose next morning, they were still wrapped in profound slumber. Probably it was as he looked at them, that the innocent subterfuge of flight suggested itself to Rāma. He turned to the charioteer, and bade him yoke his steeds without delay. He was persuaded that the people would die rather than return to Ayodhyā without him, and it was a prince's duty not only to alleviate the sufferings of his subjects, but also to refuse them permission to share in his own inevitable burdens. The horses had been carefully fed and groomed the night before. The car was got ready in a few seconds, and the fugitives succeeded in escaping, without waking a single person. When they had reached the further banks of the stream, they found a wide, clear path, along which it was possible to travel with the utmost speed. All that day, they journeyed through their native kingdom of Koshala, Rāma pointing out to Sītā places of interest by the way. From the houses of the peasants, that stood close to the road, they could hear loud condemnations of Dasharatha and the wicked queen. We are told that Koshala was blessed with great fertility. The country abounded with grain and fruit trees. The pastures were full of cattle. Temples and stakes for animal sacrifices were so numerous that they could not be counted.

The people were well fed and happy, free from all danger of invasion. Every village was worthy of a king. As they crossed the Gumti Rāma began to think of the time when he would come back from exile and hunt the beasts of the forest once more. In this connexion he observed that, in the opinion of royal saints, it was not considered a sin for kings to indulge in the pleasures of the chase.[1]

Rama meets with Guha

Towards evening they passed beyond the bounds of his father's kingdom and reached the shores of the Ganges, that sacred river where gods, demons and men, deer, birds and snakes delight to dwell. There Rāma was greeted by an old friend, Guha, chief of the Nishādas. They embraced one another with the greatest affection. Guha quickly prepared the richest foods, sweets and liquors of different kinds. But these were all declined, Rāma briefly telling his host that his wife, his brother and himself were seeking the woods, to live the hermit life, and must be content with woodland fare, and sleep upon the bare ground. Next morning, preparations were made for crossing the Ganges. Before they set out Rāma gave careful instructions to Sumantra, the charioteer, as to what he should say to Dasharatha, Bharata, Kausalyā and the other queens. In speaking of his father, Rāma declared that a king's wishes should never be interfered with,

[1] When the citizens awoke and found that Rāma had escaped they were filled with consternation and woe. They tried to follow the tracks of his car, but when at last all traces failed, they returned disconsolate to Ayodhyā. For a time the proposal was canvassed of making the great pilgrimage to the Himālayas and dying there. Others suggested that they should light a fire and cast themselves into the flames. Wiser counsels prevailed: and as has been said, they went back to the capital. But there, they had to face the reproaches of their wives, who told them that the only man worthy of the name was Lakshmana. He alone was faithful and had not forsaken the prince. They swore by their children that they would set out and find Rāma. They would not stay to be oppressed and insulted by Kaikeyi. The city, forsaken by the gods, would soon be destroyed. Throughout that day, not a single shop was opened, the temples were forsaken, the altar fires were not lighted, there was no muttering of sacred texts, no food was cooked, and even young mothers could find no pleasure in gazing at their first-born babes. A few cantos later we are told that Rāma told the people to return to Ayodhyā, and that they bade him a formal good-bye. Rāma's flight, as recorded above, is forgotten.

and his commands immediately obeyed. He hoped that Sumantra would do everything he could to make his father forget his grief. He was confident that when Bharata was once installed as king, Dasharatha would be comforted. He sent loving messages to all the queens and to Kaikeyi in particular. As to their forest life, Sumantra was to say that they were all very happy, as happy as if they had been at home in Ayodhyā, and they were looking forward to the happy day when they would be re-united once more. For Bharata, his message was that he should always obey his father and treat all the queens with equal courtesy. By doing so he would acquire great merit and happiness here and hereafter. In reply Sumantra asked permission to stay with Rāma in the forest. If Rāma refused he would set fire to his chariot and perish in the flames. He had not the courage to return to a grief-stricken people, especially to his grief-stricken parents, and say that all was well. He could not go to Kausalyā and tell her not to weep. 'So false a tale, I cannot frame. Yet how speak truth and grieve the dame.' If allowed to stay with Rāma in the forest, he would enjoy it immensely, while the horses, for their services to the prince in his ascetic life, would be exalted to heaven. As for himself, he would surrender both Ayodhyā and heaven, if he could be always in the society of Rāma. In response to these earnest pleadings, repeated again and again with many tears, Rāma could only say that it was Sumantra's duty to return to Ayodhyā, and in particular to assure Kaikeyi that Rāma had indeed fulfilled his pledge and was now a real dweller in the woods. He knew how greatly Sumantra loved him, and for that very reason he asked him to return and to repeat word for word the messages he had told him to convey.

The Ganges crossed

Having matted their hair with the juice of the fig tree and coiled it on the top of their heads, after the manner of hermits, Rāma and Lakshmana accompanied by Sītā and Guha, embarked in a boat, and crossed to the

further shore of the Ganges. Sītā addressed a prayer to that sacred river, in which she declared that the river was able to grant the desires of her suppliants, inasmuch as she was indeed the daughter of a god, come down from heaven.[1] She promised that if the river gave them a happy issue out of their distresses, and brought them home again in safety at the end of their fourteen years of exile, she would present a hundred thousand cows, with costly robes and corn and wine to the Brāhmins, and make offerings of corn and wine and flesh, at every shrine and altar on the river's banks. When they reached the further shore, the exiles bade farewell to Guha and plunged into the forest. After travelling a long distance, they resolved to spend the night beneath a great fig tree which stood near a beautiful lake. Having slain a deer and cooked its flesh on a fire made of fallen boughs they ate their simple meal and lay down to rest. While Sītā slept the two brothers remained awake, anxious about Sītā's safety, but in particular filled with dark forebodings as to what was happening in Ayodhyā. Rāma was overcome with doubts and fears. He was afraid that Kaikeyi would cause their father to be slain, and their mothers as well. He was convinced that his own mother, in a previous birth, must have been guilty of some awful crime, such as depriving mothers of their children. And now she was doomed to reap the fruit of her iniquity, and be robbed of her only son. He dwelt upon the devastating power of love, greater than that of greed or zeal for righteousness, able to enslave and overthrow the wisdom and judgement of mankind. And he begged Lakshmana to return at once to Ayodhyā and, by his presence, do something to avert the evils that were sure to follow. To these appeals Lakshmana answered as he had done before. He confessed that he would be glad to see his father and the beloved city once more, but that was nothing to the joy he found in his brother's companionship. He could not live without him, any more than a fish could, when left

[1] The story of her descent is told in Book I.

stranded on the shore. Next morning they continued their journey, till they reached the place where the Jumna joins the Ganges. The beauty of the prospect filled them with wonder, and they gazed their fill at the countless trees, adorned with every kind of blossom. Towards evening, they came to Prayāga and at no great distance espied the smoke rising from before the woodland cot of the great saint Bharadvāja.[1]

The hermitage of Bharadvaja

The sage was surrounded by a band of his disciples, and as the exiles entered his presence they raised their joined hands in token of reverence, saying who they were and why they had come. Bharadvāja received them graciously, caused water and hermits' fare to be set before them, and made them various gifts, including a bull. When Rāma asked advice as to where they should set up their hermitage, the sage invited them to attach themselves to his own community. But the hero was of the opinion that they were too near human habitations, and that people would come to gaze at them and disturb their solitude. Bharadvāja thereupon proposed that they should go to the mountain of Chitrakuta, some seventy miles distant. Its sacred peaks had long been the abode of saints and sages whom it had inspired to holy living and purity of thought. It was a place of great beauty with wide views over rivers and table-lands. The lapwing and cuckoo filled the air with their cries the live long day. Great herds of deer and elephants, thousands of monkeys and bears inhabited its woods. Next morning, in accordance with the saint's advice, the exiles set out in the direction of Chitrakuta. They did not go without his blessing, much to Rāma's satisfaction, as the blessing of so great and holy a man was sure to bring them happiness and success. They ferried themselves across the Jumna on a raft of logs and bamboos which they

[1] Bharadvāja was the son of Brihaspati, the priest of the gods. His mother was married to another man, and for that reason, the child's mother was told, *Bhara-dwā-jam*, or 'cherish the child of two fathers.' Bharadvāja was the father of Drona the preceptor of the Pāndus. For his unusual birth (he was born from a bucket) see *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 31.

made with their own hands, while Lakshmana constructed for his sister-in-law a comfortable seat with branches of the apple tree and sugar-cane. The raft was large enough to carry their weapons, coats of bark, ornaments and a spade. When their vessel was in mid, stream, Sītā offered fervent prayers to the river, remembering that she was a goddess and a daughter of the Sun. She promised that she would sacrifice a thousand cows and pour forth in gratitude a hundred jars of wine, if Rāma returned in safety to Ayodhyā, when the days of their exile were over.[1] They landed near a famous fig tree, called Shyāma, to which Bharadvāja had specially bidden them to direct their prayers. Sītā once more was the suppliant, and her prayers were of the same purport as before. The travellers continued their journey as on the previous day, Lakshmana in front, Rāma behind, and Sita for saftey in the midst. When they had walked for about ten miles, they came to a pleasant and level spot on the bank of a river. There they resolved to spend the night, making their evening repast on the flesh of a deer which one of the brothers slew.

Arrival at Chitrakuta

When they resumed their journey, the next morning, they had not to travel far to reach their destination. The beauty of the forest filled them with wonder and admiration, and they dwelt on the happiness that was in store for them. On reaching Chitrakuta the first person they met was the great saint, Vālmīki, who invited them to sit down and rest. But Rāma was too impatient to rest and he called upon Lakshmana to go at once and select suitable timber to build a forest dwelling right away. This was quickly accomplished, and to consecrate their new home a deer was slain and set upon a consecrated fire. When the carcass had been sufficiently roasted, Rāma bathed and repeated the appropriate sacred texts and prayers, addressed to the Vishvadevas, Rudra and Vishnu. He also made

[1] Mr. Griffith says in his translation, 'For thee shall bleed a thousand kine. A hundred jars shall pour their wine.' p. 160. Mr. Dutt says, 'I will worship thee with a thousand cows and hundred vessels of wine.' Book ii, 55. p. 347.

offerings and erected shrines and altars. We are told that the gods, with Brahmā at their head, came to witness the ceremony, and when all was over returned to their abodes in heaven.[1]

The situation in Ayodhya

The story now takes the reader back to Ayodhyā and describes the condition in which Sumantra found it when he arrived on the third night after parting with Rāma. When the people saw that the charioteer had returned, they surrounded his car in thousands demanding to know where Rāma was and how he fared. They broke out into uncontrollable grief when they learned that he was indeed beyond the Ganges and had already begun to live the forest life. At every lattice and on every roof, as he passed, Sumantra could see women 'wild with woe,' and when he passed within the palace walls and had traversed its seven courts, the ladies of the zenana poured forth the same questions and the same lamentations. In the inmost court he found Dasharatha, sitting forlorn and desolate, and before Sumantra could convey to him his son's last message, the old man fell fainting to the ground. Poor Kausalyā could not refrain from casting a taunt at the unconscious king. She told him to be brave, Kaikeyi was not present, and he need not be afraid to ask questions and to comfort others who were in sorrow as well as he. When Dasharatha recovered consciousness, he dwelt, as he had done before, on the sufferings which the gently nurtured exiles would have to undergo. Sumantra conveyed the loving and generous messages of Rāma, nor did he forget the special appeal to Kausalyā, to be patient and forgiving towards Kaikeyi, loyal and respectful to Bharata in his new and highly exalted dignity of king. He also

[1] The Vishvadevas, or all the gods, is a term applied to a number (usually nine or ten) of somewhat vague deities. Daksha and Kratu, two of the Prajāpatis, occupy a place among them. Rudra is another name for Shiva. It will be noted that Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva, the three great gods of Hinduism, are here brought together. The worship of the Vishvadevas is enjoined upon Brahmins by Manu. See *Laws of Manu*, p. 38.

In consecrating their new home Rāma said, 'Procuring meat, we will worship the deity presiding over this dwelling. Those who wish to live long, should pacify the household gods.' Dutt's translation, p. 349.

revealed the bitter taunts and angry protests of Lakshmana, who could not forgive his father for yielding to the clamours of a cruel and envious woman. While admitting that the Lord of all had prompted the king's action, and by so doing approved of it, he held that his father was the cause of their suffering. He had shut his eyes to the wickedness of his conduct, and because he had done so Lakshmana refused to call him father any longer. Nor did he believe that the people would continue to look upon him as their king. Sumantra added that when, in obedienee to Rāma's command, he turned his chariot in the direction of home, the horses obeyed most unwillingly, and showed the greatness of their grief by weeping bitterly. On his return journey, too, he found that lakes and rivers had run dry, trees and shrubs and flowers had withered, birds were sitting silent and gloomy, four-footed beasts stood stock still, and serpents ceased to crawl, thereby showing to what extent nature shared the common sorrow.

Grieving for Rama

Both Dasharatha and Kausalyā, as they listened to Sumantra's description, gave full vent to the expression of their grief. At one moment they appealed to the charioteer to yoke his car and take them to the forest right away. At another they dwelt on the endless glory the exiles would achieve and foretold the heavenly bliss that would be their portion, as the reward of their faithfulness and the adoption of the hermit life. At last, exhausted and overstrained, Kausalyā turned with anger and bitterness upon the king, declaring that if he had been faithful to his duty as one of the twice-born, and listened with any profit to the teaching of the Vedas, he would never have driven his son into exile. It was one more proof of the fact that he had never loved her. To these taunts Dasharatha made a very meek reply. Joining his hands together after the manner of a suppliant, he reminded his wife that a woman must never fail to reverence her husband as a god. It was not a wife's business to ask whether her

husband was virtuous or vicious. Her duty was always one and the same, never to utter one bitter word in condemnation of her lord. As she listened to her husband's calm rebuke Kausalya was humbled to the dust. Casting herself at the king's feet she begged forgiveness with many tears. Her husband was her lord both here and hereafter. She pleaded, in excuse, the greatness of her grief, which had caused her to forget the teachings of religion and the claims of duty which she knew so well.

Night had by this time fallen, the fifth night since Rāma had gone into exile. Both the king and queen had fallen asleep, worn out by weeping and by sorrow, but near midnight the king awoke and asked the queen to listen while he told her of an evil deed of which he had been guilty in the days of his thoughtless youth. When she heard his tale she would understand why he was condemned in his old age to suffer separation from his son. Many years before, in the lifetime of his father, he had gone just before dawn in the rainy season to the banks of the river Sarju, with his bow and arrows, hoping to slay some of the elephants, tigers and buffaloes, which came there to drink. As he stood concealed in the thick brushwood, he heard, as he thought, an elephant approaching the stream. Confiding in his skill he shot an arrow in the direction of the sound. To his horror, he heard, not the cry of a wounded beast, but the voice of a human being in pain and, worse still, the wounded man proved to be a hermit who in his agony began to ask what evil he had done. He was a youth living separate from the world and all its evil deeds. Roots and fruit were his only food. He bound his hair in hermit coils. His garments were made of skins and bark. He was the only support of his blind and aged parents. How would they live when his body returned to the five elements of which it was composed? His death would soon be followed by theirs. There seemed to be no reward, no fruit of all their spiritual toil.

Dasharatha's sins of early youth

Were asceticism and the study of sacred texts of no avail? Overcome with horror and shame Dasharatha hurried to the spot where the hermit lay, manifestly at the point of death. Despite the greatness of his pain the dying youth was anxious that his murderer should not suffer unduly for his sin. He therefore bade him go at once to his father and sue for pardon. If he did not do so, the old man would destroy him with the fire of his wrath. Naturally Dasharatha thought that his hands were stained with a Brāhmin's blood, but the hermit added words of infinite consolation to the prince. He was not to think that he had killed a Brāhmin, he had not been guilty of that great sin.[1] The youth did not even belong to the twice-born. His father was a member of the Vaishya caste and his mother was a Shūdra. When he had thus spoken the young man died. Obedient to the commands of the hermit Dasharatha followed the path which led to where the old couple lived. He found them sitting before their cottage door, blind and helpless, like birds whose wings have been clipped. They were talking lovingly and anxiously of their son, wondering why he had been absent so long. Hearing the approaching footsteps, and thinking that he had come at last, the old man asked the reason of his delay. His mother had been filled with alarm. She was afraid that they had in some way offended him. If that were so, he must forgive them and continue to be kind. He was their only hope and stay, their only friend and helper. Trembling in every limb Dasharatha told as best he could the awful news, and with joined hands implored the aged saints to pardon the sin, of which with no evil intent he had been guilty. When his first grief was over, the father told the prince that if he had not come and fully confessed his wicked deed, nothing would have saved him from destruction. His head would have burst into a thousand pieces. As for those who even raised a weapon against a religious devotee death

1 See *The Laws of Manu*, on the sin of killing a Brahmin. Pp. 2, 49, 88, 107, 115, 120.

was the only penalty; while the murder of a saint brought down the great god Indra from his seat in heaven.[1] But Dasharatha could not hope to escape altogether the fruit of his foolish and thoughtless deed. And the hermit solemnly cursed him to be bereft of his son, and to feel the pangs of sorrow for the loss of one he greatly loved. Yet because he had sinned unwittingly this punishment would not come upon him, till many years had passed and the hour of death was nigh. Guided by Dasharatha the old couple tottered to the place where their dead son was lying. Casting themselves upon the breathless clay they begged him to speak, pleaded for an answering embrace, and bemoaning the future recalled the loving service he had rendered to them in the past. They asked him to wait but one more day and they would go together to the realm of death. And there they would appeal to the lord of the lower world, that, because their son had been slain by the arrow of an enemy, he might share the bliss that is in store for brave men killed in the field of battle. The father then pictured his prayer as being answered, and his son raised to heaven, enjoying the society of departed heroes, Dhundhumār, Nahusha, Dilīpa, Sagara, and Shivi,[2] and of those others, who by the gift of a thousand cows, asceticism, knowledge of sacred texts, obedience to their masters or faithfulness to one wife, had earned the right to pass to these happy abodes. As the parents thus wept and prayed, the spirit of their son suddenly issued from the dead body and appearing to them in heavenly guise told them not to mourn. He assured them that he was dwelling in heaven and was possessed of the highest bliss. This was the reward of his devotion to their service and the love he had bestowed upon them. They would very soon be sharers in his joy. Having uttered these words of consolation, he ascended to heaven, seated in a shining car, with the god Indra at

[1] For Indra's murder of Twashtri's son, see *Mahābhārata*. p. 102.

[2] Most of these heroes are referred to in the *Mahābhārata*. See pp. 103, 107, 232.

his side. The parents at once erected a funeral pyre, placed the dead body upon it, and gave it to the flames. But this was not all. They cast themselves into the fire, and while their bodies were consumed their spirits passed to heaven to dwell with their son even as he had said.[1]

Death of Dasharatha

Having told this touching story, the old king began once more his unavailing lamentation for his exiled son. He knew that he could not hope to see him again. Filled with sudden fear and realizing that his last hour had come he asked Kausalyā and Sumitrā to place their hands in his. Overcome with sorrow and exhaustion the queens fell asleep. While they lay thus, unconscious of their last great affliction, Dasharatha's spirit passed away from this world. Next morning, at dawn, the royal attendants gathered in crowds to render service to the king. There were minstrels and story tellers, singing his praise and by their music awaking the birds to life and song. Some of these birds were in the palace gardens, but others were kept in cages. The attendants were ladies of high degree, eunuchs and maid-servants. They came bringing the articles of the toilet including Ganges water in golden ewers. When they received no summons from the royal apartment, the attendants ventured to enter the room. They found Kausalyā and Sumitrā plunged in sleep, with the marks of sorrow and weeping on their faces, and next to Kausalyā's bed, lying on a couch, the lifeless body of the king. The queens were immediately roused and when they realized that their lord was dead, they cast themselves upon the corpse, where they lay like stars hurled from the firmament of heaven. The whole palace was soon filled with the sound of lamentation. Kaikeyi and the other ladies of the zenana, came hurrying to the scene.

[1] This story is noteworthy, not merely for its intrinsic beauty, but for the breadth and tolerance of its teaching. The son of a mixed marriage is recognized as a pious hermit, is allowed to read the Vedas, and to acquire merit. In particular, he obtains heaven, which he enters in the society of the god Indra. See the *Laws of Manu*, by way of contrast.

When the source of all their woes entered the room, Kausalyā took her dead husband's head upon her lap, and poured forth a flood of rage and invective upon her rival. But this soon passed, and she spoke with touching pathos of her son's exile and her own lonely state. She declared that she had no desire to live, and would cast herself upon the fureral pyre. [1] When the king's ministers were summoned, they wisely resolved to postpone the funeral ceremonies until Bharata was present. They accordingly placed the body in a cask of oil, not omitting to perform the rites and ceremonies which religious custom required. We are told that the women drove their nails deep into their heads, knees and breasts, so great and uncontrolled was their grief.

Dasharatha's Ministers

The ministers, Jāvāli, Gautama, Kātyāyan, Mārkandeya, and Vāmadeva, the son of Kashayapa,[2] invited the prime minister, Vashishtha to take immediate action and send for Bharata. He was at that time, along with his brother, Shatrughna, staying with his maternal grandfather, Ashvapati, king of the Kekayas, at his capital Rājagriha (in the Punjab.) These statesmen dwelt at length on the dangers that surround a country in which there is no king, and said that a successor to Dasharatha must be chosen without delay. Their argument was as follows. Rain ceases to fall in the country that is deprived of its ruler. Sons fight with their fathers and wives disobey their husbands. The twice-born cease to attend to prayer and sacrifice. The study of Scripture is abandoned by the wise. Devotees give up their ascetic practices, and their meditation on Brahmā. Merchants are afraid to go into foreign countries in pursuit of gain. Shopkeepers find no profit in buying and selling. The farmer no longer sleeps securely, confident in the king's power to protect his property. The citizens do not meet together in the gardens and other places of public resort. Games

1 This is *Sati*, but, as we shall see, Kausalyā did not act upon her resolve.

2 See Note 5. Dasharatha's ministers.

of archery, which the spectator loves to witness and applaud, the listening to tales of ancient days, the drama and song, which the eager crowd delights in, all these are absent from the land over which no king rules. Nor is it possible to see unmarried girls adorned with gems and gold, flocking in happy bands to spend the hours of evening playing in the gardens. Nor does the lady venture to go forth to the woods, attended by her lover in his car. Everything is in confusion and men prey upon one another, the stronger devour the weaker, just as big fish are said to swallow little fish. Atheists, too, raise their heads and speak and act against the rules which pious men have set up for the good of the world. A king is necessary to guide and control, even as in the human body the eye sees and directs everything. A king is at once father and mother and friend to his subjects. The world is plunged in darkness, and no one can distinguish between right and wrong when kings cease to reign.

Bharata's return to Ayodhya

The envoys who were sent to Rājagriha to recall Bharata were enjoined to say nothing of his father's death, or of Rāma's exile. On the night previous to their arrival Bharata had a dreadful dream, in which he saw the king falling headlong from a mountain top into a lake of mire, where he lay laughing loudly and drinking mighty draughts of oil. There was a great earthquake, also, which tore the earth asunder and split the hills in two. At one moment his father was seen riding on a boar, at another he was seated in a chariot drawn by asses. There were many other gloomy portents which filled him with fear. He was specially perturbed by the vision of the ass-drawn chariot, a sure token that death was approaching some member of his family. Just as he had finished telling the story of his dream to his attendants, the following morning, the messengers from Ayodhyā were ushered into Bharata's presence. In response to his enquiries he was told that the aged king and all the other members of the royal family

were well, but that the ministers of the king and his household priest desired that he should return home without delay. This Bharata immediately prepared to do. In parting with him his grandfather presented him with many costly gifts. They included a thousand strings of golden beads, sixteen hundred horses, elephants of the same breed as those which belonged to the god Indra, swift asses and huge dogs as strong as tigers. Seven days were spent on the return journey. When he reached Ayodhyā, Bharata was filled with fresh forebodings at the sight of empty and silent streets. Turning to his charioteer he asked why the temple doors were standing wide open, why no incense filled the air, why shrines and idols were neglected by their worshippers, and why the faces of the few he chanced to see were wet with tears. To these questions he received no reply. But when he entered the palace and stood in his mother's presence, that lady quickly told him, as if it were a matter for joy, that his father was dead, 'for lust of sway had made her mad.' Overwhelmed with sorrow Bharata cast himself upon the ground. He had hoped that he was summoned to be present at Rāma's coronation in the kingship with his father, and he bewailed his fate that he had not been there to share with Rāma the privilege of performing the last funeral rites. Lamenting that his father would never again stroke his head in love and tenderness he asked that Rāma might be told of his arrival—Rāma, whose humble slave he was always ready to be, and to whom he now turned as brother, friend and father, his only hope and refuge. Kaikeyi, still hoping that her son would be pleased to learn that the sovereignty was within his grasp, gradually told the whole truth. In answer to his questions, she confessed that Rāma was in exile, not because he had robbed a Brāhmin of houses and gold, not because he had killed an unborn child, not because he had deprived another man of his lawfully wedded wife, but because she, Kaikeyi, had so planned it in that blind deceitful cunning which is characteristic of womankind.

And as a result the king had died of grief. She pleaded that what she had done was done out of love for her darling boy, and urging him to be brave and to cast sorrow aside called upon him to perform his father's funeral ceremonies, and have himself installed as king without further delay.

Bharata's grief

Burning with indignation Bharata replied that his mother, by her evil deed, had plunged him into the deepest sorrow, robbed him of all honour in the eyes of the world, and now she was pouring salt into his wounds. It was the unvarying rule of their royal house that the eldest son should reign. He would set off for the woods at once and compel his brother to return. He had no desire to rule and he renounced her for ever. His father had cherished coals of fire in his bosom, and now he was lying, slain by the woman who should have loved him. He could not believe that she was her father's daughter. She was a fiend in human form sent by fate to destroy the race of Ikshvāku. Her reward for her sin, for which she showed no sign of repentance or sorrow, would be to descend into hell, and she need never hope to dwell in heaven with her lord, because hell would be her portion for evermore. The wrong she had done to Kausalyā, it also could never be atoned. Men were wont to trace the form and features, the thoughts and disposition of a father in his son, and for that reason, mothers loved their sons better than the rest of all their kinsfolk. He recalled in illustration of that fact the story of Surabhi,[1] the divine cow and mother of all the cattle that roam the earth. One day Surabhi saw a cruel farmer overdriving the two oxen that he had yoked to his plough. Seeing her two sons thus ill used, with the hot sun beating down upon their heads and necks, Surabhi began to weep. Some of her tears fell upon the god Indra as he passed through the air

[1] Surabhi is usually identified with Kāmdhenu, the cow of plenty, which wrought such wonders for her owner, Vasishtha, the prime minister of Dasharatha, in his quarrel with Vishvāmitra. She was one of the products at the Churning of the Ocean. On the other hand, the *Rāmāyana* says she was a daughter of Kashyapa. Book iii. 14.

beneath her. Looking up Indra saw the goddess and asked her why she wept. Surabhi replied that she was weeping for her children, and every one knew that there was nothing to equal a mother's love for her son. And the moral of Bharata's tale was this. If the goddess felt so much for two of her offspring when she had many thousands more to love and think of, what must Kausalyā's grief be like when she was robbed of the only son she had. But his last words to his mother were the most bitter of all. He ordered her from his presence with the parting advice to go and dwell in Dandaka forest, to which she had been the cause of sending Rāma, and if she would not do that, either hang herself or cast herself into the fire. When Rāma was back and ruling over his kingdom, but not till then, would it be possible to forget the grievous sin in which, through her folly, both mother and son had been involved.

Bharata protests his innocence

By this time many of his father's ministers had gathered round and Bharata, in a loud voice so that all could hear, protested his innocence, declaring that he and Shatrughna had been entirely ignorant of his mother's cruel and wicked purpose, absent as they both were in a distant country. News of his arrival had by this time been conveyed to Rāma's mother, and that lady demanded an immediate interview. When they saw her lying prostrate, both brothers cast their arms around her neck. But this gesture of affection did not curb the tongue of the distracted queen, and she taunted Bharata with partnership in the crime which had driven Rāma to the woods and made him lord of a land that was rich in rice and corn, steeds and elephants, chariots and gems. Her cruel words pierced Bharata to the heart, and he called down curses at great length on anyone who should prove to have aided or abetted a sin which he utterly abhorred. For such a person he prayed that his mind might be so darkened that it would never turn to the words of Scripture; that he might become the bondsman of

the most base and churlish of men; that he might be guilty of striking a sleeping cow, of refusing to pay the fee he had promised to a priest for assisting in a sacrifice, of betraying the secret of a friend, which he had sworn not to divulge, and of criminal intercourse with the wife of his superior. He prayed that he might be married to a wife of low birth and die childless, that he might never do a virtuous deed, be possessed with fear in the hour of battle and be slain as he fled from the field; be a perverter of the teaching of the Vedas; wander as a beggar, clothed in rags, and carrying a skull, condemned to seek his bread from door to door; be regardless of his duties to the gods and the spirits of the dead; be asleep at sunset, the hour at which religious observances are due; be a deceiver of the poor and helpless, a scorner of the suppliant, a poisoner of wells; a man driven from the society of the good, a husband who despised his own wife and left her in loneliness and neglect, to seek for pleasures that are forbidden to honest men. These curses, uttered by Bharata with such vehemence, made his innocence plain, and removed from Kausalyā's mind every doubt and question. Taking Bharata to her breast she gave thanks that he was equal to Lakshmana in loyalty and brotherly love, and she was confident that in another world he would attain to those lofty abodes which were his due. We are told that the three spent the night in weeping. But with the coming of a new day the saint Vasishtha went to the prince and told him that he must spent no more time in aimless sorrow. He had a duty to perform which did not brook further delay. His father's body must now be placed upon the funeral pyre. In obedience to this appeal Bharata caused the body to be taken from the oil in which it was immersed and placed on a bed of gold studded with gems. While this was being done, and Bharata gazed for the first time on the dead face of a father he had loved so passionately, there was a fresh outburst of grief, as he pictured the city robbed of those who had guarded

it so well. The land they loved was no longer beautiful. The city of Ayodhyā was as dark and gloomy as a moonless night. Vasishtha once more had to interfere. Servants and priests were summoned to their solemn tasks. The sacred fire was lighted, the fragrant juices of sandal-wood, cedar, aloe and pine were sprinkled on the body, the funeral texts were recited and singers chanted verses from the *Sāma Veda.*

Cremation of Dasharatha

In the long procession that followed to the burning ground, the royal ladies took a part, riding in litters and chariots. The funeral pyre was erected on the banks of the Sarju river, and when the body was laid thereon, the priests encircled it walking from right to left before committing it to the flames. The queens then touched their lips with water taken from the stream and returning to the palace cast themselves upon the ground, where they lay for ten days and wept till they could weep no more. On the twelfth day Brāhmins were loaded with gifts, gold, gems, food, goats whose hair was long and white, thousands of coins, male and female slaves, chariots and horses. On the thirteenth day Bharata and Shatrughna returned to the river to gather the ashes of the dead. Once more they threw themselves upon the ground where they rolled about almost out of their minds with grief. Declaring that they were overwhelmed in a sea of sorrow, Bharata compared Kaikeyi to a shark, and said that his father's kindness to that wicked woman seemed to add strength to every wave of grief. He could not understand how the earth was not rent asunder deprived as it was of Dasharatha's love of justice and his strong controlling hand. But he had left them and gone to the abodes of the blessed, he who had satisfied their every need. Thinking on his father's love he felt that he could live no longer. He would cast himself into the fire. He would set off at once for the woods. Both brothers were like bulls with broken horns, and once more Vasishtha had to

tell them to be calm. There were rules to be obeyed. They must delay no longer. It was their duty to gather forthwith the ashes of the dead and what bones remained. No mortal was freed from suffering. In this world birth and death, pleasure and pain, gain and loss, shadowed without ceasing the pathway of men. All things are, and again all things cease to be.

On their return to the palace Shatrughna told his brother that he could understand why Rāma was resolved to carry out his father's pledge, but it was past his comprehension why Lakshmana did not take some action to prevent so great an injustice, and declare the banishment annulled. While he was speaking, the hunchback ventured to appear at the gateway, gorgeously arrayed in robes and jewels, fit for a queen. Girdled with zones and chains of gold she looked more like a monkey than a human being. The warder at once hastened to the princes and told them that the woman who was ultimately responsible for all their woes stood without. Shatrughna filled with sudden anger called upon his attendants to seize and punish the hunchback as she deserved. But he was not content to leave the punishment to others. Laying hold of the poor wretch, he dragged her to and fro along the floor. Her chains and trinkets were snapped and scattered over the ground, making it look like an autumn sky studded with stars. At length, he dragged her to the place where Kaikeyi dwelt. Afraid lest she would be similarly treated, Kaikeyi fled for protection to her son. The prince at once interposed and bade his brother restrain his wrath. It would never do to kill a woman. For himself he would be only too willing to kill his mother in punishment and revenge for her heinous crimes. But he knew that if he did so Rāma would hold him in eternal hatred. Even the murder of the slave girl would mean that Rāma would never speak words of loving-kindness to them again. At these words Shatrughna released his

Manthara punished

victim who crept to Kaikeyi's feet and took shelter there.

On the following day, the fourteenth day after the funeral, the nobles of the state approached Bharata and asked him to prepare at once for coronation as king. It was necessary for the welfare of the state that he assume regal authority and ward off the danger of invasion and anarchy. He might rest assured that the people desired him to do so. To this Bharata firmly replied that it was quite impossible. The invariable rule in the house of Ikshvāku was that the eldest son should reign, and it was strange that men in their position should advise him to do what was both wrong and foolish. But there was something else he was prepared to do, and to do without delay. Set out for the woods and compel his brother to return. Nay! they would take with them all that was necessary for the enthroning of a king, the sacred vessels, the oil for anointing, and they would bring him back rejoicing as priests do when they bring the holy fire from the temple of a god. For himself he would remain in the forest, his brother's substitute, to do penance for his mother's sin. And so he bade them prepare for an immediate departure, to gather workmen who would hew a way through the forest, workmen to fill up the valleys, to level the hills, to bridge the rivers, to make a highway smooth and broad for the coming of their king, with tents at appointed places where he might rest on his triumphal journey home. These noble words not only silenced Bharata's hearers, but filled them with admiration and joy. They prayed that fate might never be unkind to one whose words and deeds made plain his unswerving desire to see his eldest brother king. Nor was Bharata unmoved by their response. His bosom swelled and his eyes filled with tears. The next canto tells how a way was prepared, apparently in a single night, right to the banks of the Ganges. It describes the multitude of workmen, their spades and wheels, their machines and

Bharata prepares to go in search of Rama

engines. It tells of how wells were dug and tanks formed, how bricks were made, stones and flints pounded to powder, trees cut down and the ground cleared of bushes and creepers. It even says that trees were planted in desert places. And, as has been mentioned already, not only pits and holes, but even valleys, were filled up, while hills had cuttings made through them or were reduced to the level of the surrounding country. Channels, too, were made for water, and the running water that was secured flowed in such abundance that it was worthy of comparison with the great ocean itself. At the various resting stations reality surpassed the instructions of the prince, for we learn that not only tents but palaces and altars in which the birds of the forest made their nests were erected. And they stood in spacious streets forming a city surrounded by a wall so high and a moat so deep that the height of both together made the spectator think that he was looking at Mount Mandara.[1] Every one of these resting places was so wonderfully beautiful that they had no match on earth or in heaven, unless it be Indra's own city in the skies.

Bharata declines the throne

Bharata had to endure yet another appeal to assume the sovereignty, and from no less a person than the sage, Vasishtha. On the following morning, the day on which he had resolved to set out, Vasishtha, surrounded by his disciples, came to the great assembly hall, and having seated himself on a golden throne covered with rich brocade commanded a messenger to summon Bharata to his presence. When Bharata appeared, followed by a great multitude already equipped for their journey, Vasishtha told him that his father's death and his brother's voluntary exile had made it his duty, as well as his prerogative, to accept the throne. He therefore invited him to summon the vassal kings from every direction, from north, south, east and west, to come and bring tribute in

[1] Mount Mandara was many thousands of miles high.

acknowledgment of his supreme dominion over them.[1] To this request Bharata replied as he had done before and also expressed his wonder at the sage proposing that he should do what was unjust. Were he to be guilty of such a sin, he would bring disgrace on his royal lineage. Rāma was as great as the greatest of his ancestors. Rāma was the rightful king of Ayodhyā, and he was going to him now. No one could stay him. He was going to Rāma, going as a suppliant to Rāma, who was worthy to rule heaven, earth and hell. And if Rāma refused to listen to him, then he would stay with Rāma and Lakshmana in the forest. But he was hopeful that he would succeed, and the eyes of all would soon be gladdened with the sight of their rightful king. Having thus spoken he turned to Sumantra and asked him to give orders to set the cavalcade in motion. It was a mighty force that set forth upon its way. Brāhmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, the four castes, were all represented. They rode on elephants, horses, camels and asses. They drove in waggons and chariots. There were nine thousand elephants, sixty thousand cars, one hundred thousand archers, men on foot and men on horseback. Kausalyā, Kaikeyi and Sumitra were there also. Merchants, weavers, potters, physicians, glass-workers, jewellers, fullers, dealers in incense and unguents, washermen, tailors, actors, dancers, bathmen, wineseller, distillers of liquor, hunters who snared peacocks, workers in ivory and gold, shepherds, fishermen, makers of cement and those who bored ears for rings. Full of gladness and hope this great mixed multitude, which also included women, gaily apparelled, hurried on their way, and never stopped until they reached Shringavera,[2] on the banks of the Ganges. There Bharata announced that they would spend the night, and journey to the farther shore on the following day.

[1] Kerala, the modern Malabar, is specially mentioned. The tribute to be exacted is described as ten million gems.

[2] Identified with Sungroor in the district of Allahabad.

Bharata meets with Guha

The travellers had come to the dwelling place of Guha, king of the Nishadas, and that friend and ally of Rāma was alarmed lest Bharata was seeking for the exile, with a view to putting him to death, and thus securing undisturbed possession of his father's throne. He accordingly quickly gathered a large force of his youngest and most vigorous followers, caused five hundred boats, with a complement of one hundred fishermen to each, to be assembled, and resolved to prevent Bharata from crossing the Ganges. At the same time he thought it wise to test the sentiments of the prince, and, should he find that his fears were groundless, give him every assistance in accomplishing his journey. He therefore prepared a gift of flesh, fish and honey, and advancing to Bharata's camp asked for an interview with the prince. Sumantra was able to tell Bharata not only who he was, but of the help that he had rendered to Rāma when he set forth upon his journey to the woods. He was confident that if any one could direct them to Rāma's dwelling-place, Guha could. When ushered into Bharata's presence, the aged king told the prince that all he had was at his disposal. He could not offer dainty food. He could not give them palaces to lodge in ; but roots and fruit, fresh meat and dried meat, to these they were more than welcome, he and all his host. This hospitality Bharata graciously accepted saying that there was no one else who would be so generous as to offer hospitality to so great a company. But his chief desire was to find some one to guide him to the hermitage of Bharadwāja. To this Guha replied that he would gladly act as his guide, but he must first know what was Bharata's purpose and be assured that he meant no evil against his brother. Bharata replied with so much earnestness and sincerity that Guha's fears were completely dispelled ; and he declared that Bharata's name would be handed down from generation to generation for the nobility and unselfishness of his disposition, not only in renouncing a kingdom that had come to him unsought, but for his strong resolve to persuade his brother to return.

By this time the sun had set. The soldiers and citizens were provided with hospitality. Bharata and Shatrughna lay down to rest together in the same bed. Guha was with them. But Bharata could not sleep. Grief once more mastered him, nor was his sorrow lessened by the story Guha told them of Rāma's experience in the forest. The night Rāma and Lakshmana spent with him Guha had tried in vain to persuade Lakshmana to lie down and rest. He assured him that he and his followers, who knew every glade in the forest, would be a sufficient guard. Not only so but it would afford them an opportunity of acquiring stores of merit by being associated for even so short a time with Rāma. But Lakshmana absolutely refused and, dwelling on the greatness of his brother whom neither gods nor demons could subdue, called Guha to think of the treatment to which Rāma had been exposed. The son granted to Dasharatha as the result of many prayers and great asceticism was condemned to wander in the forest a homeless exile. And he was certain that the broken-hearted parents would not be able to survive. To share in his father's funeral rites was a melancholy privilege he would not be permitted to obtain. Only one comfort remained. When the years of exile were over, they would return to the much loved city of Ayodhyā once more. It was thus Lakshmana had passed the night keeping watch and ward, not able for a moment to forget his grief. And when the sun rose, so Guha told them, the two brothers had bound their hair after the manner of hermits, put on coats of bark and, assisted by their friend, crossed to the Ganges' further shore. This pathetic description brought upon Bharata another paroxysm of grief and he fell to the ground, in a faint, stiff and cold, falling like a tree torn up by the roots. Shatrughna seeing his brother's sorrow cast himself upon his body and wailed aloud. The outcry awoke the queens and they came hurrying to the spot. Kausalyā in particular was greatly distressed. She feared that

Bharata spends a night with Guha

Bharata had been seized by some deadly disease, and that death was about to rob her of her last hope and refuge. Her husband dead, Rāma and Lakshmana in exile, she could not live another day if anything should happen to Bharata. Then another thought came to her mind. Had Bharata heard bad news? Had some calamity befallen the exiles? Was Rāma, was Lakshmana, was Sītā, dead? But even as she spoke Bharata recovered from his swoon and began to question Guha once more. He asked to be shown where Rāma and Sītā had lain and told what food they had eaten. Guha replied that they would accept nothing of what he offered. He was true to the rules of his caste saying that it was the duty of the Kshatriya to give and not to receive. He drank, however, some water that Lakshmana brought, and after performing his evening devotions lay down with Sītā to sleep on a bed of sacred grass which Lakshmana had gathered. Guha took them to see the Ingudi tree beneath whose shade the exiles had reposed. Bharata broke out in a rhapsody in praise of Rāma, and ended by saying that fate was more powerful than the gods, otherwise they would not have allowed so great a catastrophe to happen. It seemed beyond belief that the heir to so great an empire, the son of one who had ruled the earth, should lie on the bare ground.

Bharata visits Bharadwaja

On the following morning Bharata and his host crossed the Ganges. They used the five hundred boats to which reference has been made. The boats were apparently large enough to carry chariots and horses. Many of them had awnings to protect travellers from the heat of the sun. On the other hand we are told that some of the people swam across, while others made use of empty pitchers, fastened round their bodies. Before leaving the encampment, the soldiers set fire to the huts in which they had spent the night. When he reached the further shore Bharata hastened to the hermitage of the great saint Bharadwāja. He was accompanied by Vasishtha, his family chaplain. As was most proper

Vasishtha walked in front, the prince reverently following. On their arrival at the hut of the ascetic Bharadvāja greeted them courteously, presenting them with fruit and bringing water to bathe their feet. When they had answered questions as to one another's welfare, which included inquiry as to the condition of the sacred fire, the pupils, the birds and deer, the sage came to the point, and cross-examined Bharata as to the motives which brought him so far from home, accompanied by so great an army, and leaving his kingdom unprotected. He hoped that it was with no evil intent. When the prince pathetically protested that he had come to cast himself at his brother's feet and beg him to return to Ayodhyā, Bharadvāja replied that he had only asked the questions to prove more fully the greatness of Bharata's soul. He would gladly tell him where Rāma and Sītā were. They were at a place called Chitrakūta.

Bharadvaja's great miracle

But he earnestly desired that Bharata would be his guest for the night and set out upon his journey on the following day. When Bharata said that he and his army would arrange for their own supplies, and that he had kept it at a distance, that they might not do damage to the hermitage and the surrounding woods and waters, the sage said he need not be afraid of causing inconvenience. He was to bring them all both man and beast. They would do no harm and would be abundantly provided for. And so indeed they were as we shall find. Bharadvāja went to the place where he kept the sacred fire and having touched his lips with holy water, prayed to Vishvakarmā, to Indra, to Yama, Varuna and Kuvera. He asked that all the rivers that flowed either east or west might be turned in the direction of his hermitage, filled some with wine and other with liquor, while others again should remain pure water but as sweet as sugar-cane. He also asked that the nymphs of heaven be sent in great numbers, as also the Gandharvas or minstrels of the gods. Some of these he specified by name. He

made request too for food of every sort and kind and of the best quality, food the most toothsome and delightful to the palate, and for meat also of every description. When thus appealed to the gods were good enough to come in person and the most fragrant winds began to blow. Flowers fell from the skies and heavenly drums began to beat. The place too where Bharata's company was gathered was wonderfully transformed. It was in the heart of the forest. To his amazement Bharata found that for thirty miles on every side the ground had become level and was covered with the most beautiful grass, and here and there stood wonderful trees loaded with fruit and flowers, brought from Northern Kuru, where stands the garden of Kuvera, the god of wealth. Indeed, we are told that the very garden itself was transported to the hermitage of Bharadvāja, that its fruits were heavenly nymphs, and its leaves, cloth and gems. Arches and gateways adorned with banners, stables for horses and stalls for elephants, beautiful mansions and gorgeous palaces splendidly furnished with every kind of comfortable seat and couch, these too sprang into sight, the work of a moment. The palace prepared for Bharata was particularly fine. It was adorned with jewels of the rarest quality. When the prince entered it, accompanied by the ministers of state, he found that a throne had been set. But on this throne he declined to sit. Instead, he bowed before it with all reverence, recognizing that it was Rāma's, and took a seat next the throne reserved for one of the others. When Bharata and his company were seated rivers loaded with milk and curds swept their contents to the feet of the guests. The pleasures of the feast were enhanced by the fact that no less than twenty-thousand nymphs, whose beauty overpowered all who saw them, danced before them, while the Gandharvas sang the songs to which the gods themselves listen in heaven. There was other music too. At the command of Bharadvāja the Vilva trees emitted the sweetest strains, while holy fig trees

took the form of lovely ladies and danced to the fantastic music. When they had feasted, eaten and drunk their fill, seven or eight beautiful women made themselves the attendants of each man, and escorting him to a stream stripped him of his clothes and dipped him in the running water. They also rubbed and dried him with their gentle hands. And when the bath was over, sitting on the bank of the stream, they held up wine cups and urged him to drink. Nor were the animals forgotten. Camels, mules, oxen, horses and elephants were fed on grain, honey and sugar-cane. This splendid food so transformed the animals that their owners had the greatest difficulty in recognizing them. No wonder the soldiers and citizens were beside themselves with joy, at being so magnificently entertained. They declared they would not go back to Ayodhyā nor proceed to Dandaka forest. They would stay where they were, and wish a happy ending to the sorrows of Rāma and Bharata. They had got to heaven and wanted nothing better. With garlands on their heads they wandered hither and thither. They danced, they sang, they ate and drank, till they could eat and drink no more. In what would seem to be a fresh outburst, the poet breaks forth anew into a description of the food and drink they were supplied with, milk springing from subterranean fountains, lakes full of liquor, trees that dropped honey, cows that satisfied everyone, piles of meat cooked in every sort of way, and of all kinds, peafowl, deer, birds, kids, boars,[1] with a great variety of sauces, soups, fruit and various concoctions made from flowers. There were baths too, constructed on the river brink and sloping conveniently down to the water, with tooth-brushes, mirrors, boxes full of sandal wood and other unguents, preparations of eye-wash, combs for the hair, and combs for the beard, vast quantities of shoes, sandals and umbrellas. And finally every man robed himself in spotlessly white garments. They were each and all so

[1] It should be noted that, out of regard to modern prejudices Tulsidās makes no mention of the flesh food in his version of the *Rāmāyana*.

overwhelmed with wonder that they supposed they must be dreaming. It could be said in truth they were that night as happy as the gods in the garden of Indra. [1] But with the coming of a new day everything was changed; Gandharvas and Apsarases, the miraculous streams and trees, having saluted the saint disappeared from view.

Bharata approaches Chitrakuta

Without delay Bharata approached the anchorite and, with joined hands and bowed head, asked him to tell where his brother was and at what distance from their present abode. Nor did he fail to give humble thanks for the wonderful hospitality he and his army had received. The sage replied that Rāma and Sītā were at a place some four leagues distant, in the midst of a great forest, between a stream called Mandākinī and the mountain of Chitrakūta. Before they set out, the widows of king Dasharatha sought permission to embrace the feet of Bharadvāja. At his request the prince told who each of the ladies was. In speaking of Kausalyā, he said that in giving birth to Rāma she was like Aditi, [2] the mother of Vishnu; of Sumitrā, that her sons were as beautiful as the gods; and of his own mother that she had been the cause of her husband's death, been always eager to do evil and was the source of all their woes. As he said this his eyes grew red with anger and he breathed like a snake. But the holy man bade the prince be calm. His mother must not be blamed. The banishment of Rāma would be productive of many blessings to the world. This statement gave great comfort to Bharata and he walked round the sage in reverence and gratitude. Immediately thereafter the army was set in motion and began its journey towards the south. As it advanced the beasts of the forest fled in terror, seeking shelter in every direction. What with citizens and soldiers it was a vast company of people which seemed to cover the earth from sea to sea, and yet

[1] Nandan, the garden of Indra, is frequently referred to.
[2] Aditi, the wife of Kashyapa, was the mother of the gods.

marched in such close array that between man and man the ground could not be seen. Before the day was over they approached the mountain of Chitrakūta, and saw what they believed to be the Mandākinī stream. It was a scene of great beauty, which filled Bharata with admiration. Scouts were sent out to search for signs of human habitation. Some of them soon returned with the news that they had seen smoke rising from among the trees, and the wise observation that there is no fire where there are no men. It must be Rāma and his companions; if it was not they, it must be somebody else. This was an argument which Bharata could not ignore. He commanded his followers to halt and not to move from the spot. Accompanied by Sumantra and greatly excited he hastened in the direction of the fire.

Rama in the forest

The poem now proceeds to tell of Rāma himself and how he fared in the woods. It describes at length the beauty of the scenery and the impression it made on the heart of the exiles. That it might relieve his own mind, and afford interest to Sītā, the prince declared that they had no cause to grieve, living as they did in such a beautiful place in touch with nature. The noble mountain, rich with a thousand varied colours, the crystal stream, which not only anchorites but spirits from 'the middle air' frequented, the numerous trees, whose names Rāma recounted one by one, and whose boughs were the homes of myriad birds whose music filled the air; the flowers and blossoms that carpeted the ground and cast a languor over every heart; the minstrels of heaven, who came down to earth to play at their ease on the more level ground, their weapons and garments suspended the while upon the branches; the Vidyadharis too, or spirits of the air, for whom the forest was a favourite haunt, all these together, and the influence they exercised, made him ask why any one should grieve. Their life in exile conferred a double boon. It gave to Bharata the thing that he desired. For himself, he

was walking in the footsteps of his ancestors. In days gone by they always maintained that the only way for a king to secure the joys of heaven was to pass a part of his existence in the forest. He had thus gained every way. With Lakshmana and her he would pass his days in happiness, add to the fame and glory of his father's house, be faithful to his word and walk in the path of duty. They would bathe in the river three times a day. They would satisfy their hunger with roots, honey and fruit. They would rejoice in each other's society and never think of home. And if they did, they would say that the forest was their home, and its dwellers, be they men, animals or spirits, the inhabitants of that well loved town. And if the scene was beautiful by day, it was still more beautiful at night. Men talked of the beauty of Indra's heaven, of its lake and garden and stream, but Chitrakūta was more lovely still and its glories could not be surpassed.

The wonderful crow

It so happened as they wandered here and there, on the very day that Bharata reached the neighbourhood of Chitrakūta, they came to a cave in which they resolved to rest. Seated on her husband's knee and clasped to his breast, Sītā told her husband that her one happiness in life was to obey him, and she asked no question save this: What did he wish her to do? Having rested for a little they set out once more, roaming through the woods, like Shiva and Umā among the Himālayas. On their return to their cottage they found that Lakshmana had killed ten black deer and piled their carcasses in a heap to dry. Sītā was soon busy preparing food for her husband and brother-in-law. Their simple meal consisted of deer-flesh and honey. When they had eaten, but not till then, Sītā satisfied her own hunger and thereafter, at the command of Rāma, stood on guard to prevent the crows from attacking what remained of the venison. There was one crow much more audacious and agile than the others. It flew so quickly that it seemed at one moment to touch the earth and at another the sky. Rāma was much amused

when Sītā lost her temper with the bird, chasing it everywhere and yet quite unable to drive it away. At last, when it began to attack her with beak and claw, Rāma himself had to interfere. But it paid no more attention to his rebuke than it had to the efforts of Sītā. This roused Rāma's indignation and, by means of spells, he gave to his arrow a magic power which nothing could withstand. Fitting it to his bow, he sped the shaft, with the result that it pursued the crow through the three worlds of Heaven, Earth and Hell. Wherever the crow went the arrow followed and other weapons as well. The bird was no ordinary crow. It had received its power from the gods themselves. But it had to own defeat. Bending humbly before the prince it besought him to spare its life. Rāma was unable to refuse the appeal of a suppliant, but he was likewise unable to rob the enchanted arrow of the power with which it was endowed. He therefore told the crow to choose which part of its life it was willing to surrender. The crow, after much thought, resolved to surrender one of its eyes. When Rāma had exacted this partial punishment, the crow bent before him once more in reverence and disappeared from view.

Bharata draws near

It was not long after this strange incident, that Rāma noticed great clouds of dust and heard the sound as of an army on the march. The beasts of the forest were to be seen running widely in every direction seeking refuge. The prince called upon his brother to climb a tree and find out the cause. From the top of a lofty tree Lakshmana could see that it was, indeed, as they had supposed, and bade Rāma extinguish their fire at once and send Sītā to the cave of which mention has already been made. They must don their armour without delay and prepare to meet the foe. The enemy was Bharata. There was no doubt as to that. He could recognize the standard, and apparently he was coming to put them to death and make the throne, which he had seized for himself, secure. It would be

no sin to take Bharata's life. He was the agressor and would be slain in self-defence deserving of punishment as a transgressor of the law of duty. Kaikeyi, too, would be made to reap the fruit of her wickedness. In his anger Lakshmana dwelt upon the great slaughter he would accomplish, and pictured the wild beasts gorging themselves on the slain. Rāma very firmly, but also very gently, strove to calm his brother's mind. What would they gain by murder. It was a hateful thought. If he had any desire at all to reign, it was not for the sake of earthly glory but to secure the safety and happiness of his kindred. He would not wish to rule in Indra's stead, if, to secure the power of that deity, he had to transgress the law of duty. There would be nothing to live for if he lost any of his brothers. But he was sure that Bharata came to them with no evil intent. He knew Bharata's heart too well for that. It was to persuade him to return. Why should either of them doubt their brother's sincerity of purpose for a moment? Such bitter words cut him to the quick, and if it was envy that made Lakshmana speak as he did, then he would ask Bharata to yield up the throne to Lakshmana and he was confident that he would cheerfully consent. These reproaches filled the impulsive Lakshmana with shame and penitence. He now ventured to suggest that it was their father himself who had come to seek them in the forest and order their return to Ayodhyā. These words filled Rāma with new thoughts, and he declared that he could see the elephant on which his father was accustomed to ride, and yet he was not sure. No white umbrella, the sign of royalty, was visible. He therefore asked his brother to descend from the tree and give attentive heed to the instructions he wished to impart.

Bharata was now close at hand rejoicing as he came that Rāma's feet would soon be resting on his head, and impatient for the hour when his lord and brother would be the anointed, as he was the true,

king of a realm that stretched from sea to sea. As they moved forward, they could see that heaps of fuel had been collected, and marks of various kinds made upon trees, to point the way to a hermitage. And now, at last, they stood by the cottage, in which, as they trusted, Rāma had his forest home. And without a doubt it was. Bharata recognized the splendid bows which only Rāma could wield, shining like a rainbow in the sky, and the arrows whose brightness was only equalled by the sun. There were great swords, too, shields and gloves, and many ornaments of gold, which filled the cottage with a glorious splendour. One more step and Bharata stood in his brother's presence. As he gazed upon Rāma's face, with Lakshmana and Sītā seated beside him, clad in deerskin robes, emotion made him dumb and he could not utter a single word. At last his feelings found expression contrasting, as he had done so often before, the greatness of his brother's character and dignity with the humble life he was now compelled to live, and he lamented that he should have been the cause of such undeserved misfortune. How much better it would have been if he had never been born, for then he would have escaped the taunts and the hatred of his fellow citizens. At last he fell to the ground, so overcome that he could not even grasp his brother's feet, gasping out the words, 'Dear Lord,' and nothing more. Rāma had remained silent and motionless, but now he threw his arms about his brother and about Shatrughna, who had cast himself on the ground beside Bharata in lowly reverence. As one looked on the suppliants and on Guha and Sumantra who had accompanied them, one thought of Brihaspati and Shukra and the reverence they pay to the Sun and Moon. Bharata looked so tired and weary that it was with great difficulty that his brothers recognized him. When he had recovered from his swoon, Rāma raised him to his feet and, kissing his head, asked him where their father was. It did not seem wise for him to leave the kingdom

The meeting of the brothers

unprotected and to come dressed like an anchorite, wandering in the woods. To this Bharata replied that their father was dead, dead of a broken heart, and that Kaikeyi would, without a doubt, go to hell for having wrought such wickedness.

Bharata's appeal

And now he had come to the forest, with one end in view, to persuade him to accept the sovereignty and be anointed king that very day. The land of Ayodhyā was lying forlorn and forsaken, like a widow in mourning. His consenting to return would fill all his friends with gladness. Their father's ministers are now spoken of as being present and, in their name, Bharata entreats Rāma to hear their prayer. Rāma replied that, in studying his brother's character, he had never seen fault or stain of any kind, and this fact made him wonder why he should wish him to commit a sin and be unfaithful to his plighted word. And it was wrong, also, to blame his mother as he had done. There was one duty incumbent on wives and on sons, and that was the duty of obedience to their husbands and fathers. As far as he was concerned, his father had a perfect right to say, 'Go as an exile to the forest, or sit upon my throne.' Their father, advised by their mother—and he claimed that a mother was as much entitled to honour and obedience as a father—had decided what each should be and do. What was it that they decided? Was it not that Rāma should live for fourteen years in Dandaka forest, and that Bharata should reign in Ayodhyā? Having made this decision their father had departed for a better world. But living or dead, they must continue to pay respect to his decisions, and that he was resolved to do. The knowledge that he was obedient to his father's command would be a source of greater happiness than if he acquired dominion over the three worlds. To these arguments Bharata made the same answer as before. He refused to argue. In the royal house of Ayodhyā it had been the invariable rule for the eldest son to succeed his father. He entreated

him, therefore, to return. Other people might think a king was nothing but an ordinary man. In his opinion he was more than a man; he was a god. On their arrival at Ayodhyā both he and Shatrughna had completed the funeral ceremonies. But it was said that the water offering, when made by the best-loved of a man's sons, had an efficacy and power in the other world such as belonged to no others, and afforded permanent satisfaction to the dead. He therefore called upon him to make the water oblation without delay.

Rama mourns for his father

It will be remembered that Bharata informed Rāma of their father's death when they first met and Rāma, in his reply to Bharata, showed that he understood what his brother had said. But in this canto we find that mention of his father's death smote him to the ground where he lay in a faint, like a tree hewn down by a woodman, like an elephant overwhelmed by some mighty landslip as it lay asleep. His wife and brothers rushed to his side and cast water over him. When he recovered consciousness, he spoke with difficulty and his eyes filled with tears. He asked what purpose now could be served by his returning home, even when the days of exile would be over. There would be no father to guide him in the path of duty; no father to give his loving approval when he did what was right. His brothers were indeed fortunate in having had the opportunity of offering the funeral oblation. Then turning to Lakshmana and Sītā he told them that Dasharatha was now numbered with the gods in heaven. His wife and brother, joining their tears to his, wept without restraint. Even in the hour of his own great sorrow Rāma did not forget to comfort these new mourners, nor did he neglect the duty that still remained. He bade Lakshmana bring some fruit from the Ingudi tree and a fresh mantle of bark. When these had been secured, the three exiles descended into the river, Sītā first and Rāma bringing up the rear. Rāma was so exhausted with grief that

Sumantra had to give him his arm. First, filling his hollowed palm with water from the stream, he poured it forth as an offering to the shades, and as he did so prayed that his father would accept it in the place where he now dwelt. When the three had returned to the river bank, Rāma pressed the juice out of the Ingudi fruit and making a funeral cake placed it on sacred grass. Then calling upon the spirit of Dasharatha to receive the offering he added words from the sacred books, to the effect that the gods never refused to share the food which mortals were in the habit of using. On their return to the cottage the brothers and Sītā wept so loudly that the hills were filled with the sound. It was like the roaring of lions and travelled so far that the army and citizens heard it and knew that the brothers had met at last. With one accord they rushed to the spot, just as they were, mounted on horses and elephants, seated in chariots, or running on foot. The earth shook with their movement and wild beasts in terror fled before them, while the great flocks of birds that rose into the sky darkened the heavens.

Citizens add their entreaties

When they reached Rāma's presence, some of the citizens fell at his feet, others were seized and pressed close to his heart. The noise of their weeping filled both earth and heaven. The queens accompanied by Vasishtha were left far behind. As they slowly advanced Kausalyā called the attention of the others to the place where Lakshmana came to draw water for himself and the other exiles, and declared that such a noble prince should not be allowed for one more day to perform such an ignoble task. But when they reached the spot where Rāma had offered the funeral cake, and saw it lying on the sacred grass, Kausalyā could not express her wonder. There never had been in all the history of human sorrow anything so dreadful as this. Her great and noble son compelled to make so mean an offering! But she consoled herself by remembering the words of

Scripture. This was the food their sons had to eat and the gods never refused to accept the food that men were in the habit of using. At last they reached the hermitage. Rāma seemed to them to be like a god cast out of heaven, robbed of all his greatness. When he saw the ladies, Rāma followed by his wife and brother came and clasped their feet. The queens said that Sītā was like a lotus dried up by the sun, like a lily broken by the wind, like gold covered with dust, and like the moon robbed of its light. Vasishtha had followed behind the queens. On his approach Rāma touched and pressed his feet with love and reverence, even as Indra clasps the feet of Brihaspati, the priest of the gods in heaven. The people had now formed themselves into some sort of order. Rāma seated himself beside Vasishtha. The others, counsellors, ministers, officers, and citizens ranged themselves in rows behind. The one thought in the hearts of all was, what will Bharata say, and what will be Rāma's reply? Rebuffed before Bharata used another argument. He acknowledged that to please his mother their father had conferred the sovereignty on himself. But he now claimed the right to transfer it to Rāma, his brother and lord. He entreated him not to refuse. He alone was fit to govern. He alone was able to protect the people. His return would fill the hearts of the citizens with joy. As for himself he was quite unfit to assume so great a responsibility. The ass never attempted to compete with the horse, nor did ordinary birds ever think of outsoaring Garuda their king. It does not matter how big a tree may grow, or how beautiful its blossom, if it yields no fruit, it has been planted to no purpose. And his argument was that Rāma's life was being lived to no purpose, if not spent as was intended in the government and protection of his people. When Bharata had ended his appeal, the assembled multitude made it clear that they were with him heart and soul.

Rama remains Unmoved

But Rāma remained unmoved. He said it could not be. They spoke as if he were greater than Destiny. He was a man and nothing more. How could he fight against the decrees of Fate, which was master and lord of all, impelling men whither it would and making them obedient to its will. Man's capacities and powers were in its grasp. It brought things together and again it separated them from one another. 'Death was the end of Life,' pursuing us step by step in our earthly pilgrimage. Each day we welcomed the sunrise, each day we rejoiced in the sunset, and forgot that with the passing of the days our lives too were passing, bringing with it grey hairs and wrinkled skin, sickness, old age and death. Men were like logs drifting on the waters. The current one moment brought them together, at another moment, it swept them apart. They possessed wives and children, friends and earthly possessions, but it was only for a little while. When this was the universal law, why should they weep? Tears were of no avail. No one could bring back the dead. Everyone, too, was travelling on the same road and would soon be joined to their fathers who had gone before. There was one thing, and one thing only, which men could do and should do; and that was to devote themselves to righteous living. It was by right living that we secured happiness. Their father, Dasharatha, had obtained a place in heaven by the fulfilment of duty, by making gifts, by caring for his people and by the performance of religious rites. Now that he was dead, having earned the approval of good men, they should not grieve. Freed from the body he would be an inhabitant of Brahmā's heaven for evermore. It was wrong to weep and lament for one who had accomplished his duty and finished his work. They were acquainted with the teaching of the Vedas, and it taught them that the man of constant mind, possessed of wisdom, never shed idle tears or indulged in useless sorrow. He therefore called upon Bharata to restrain

his feelings, go back to Ayodhyā, accept his father's decision; while he himself would be equally obedient, by remaining in the forest, and carrying out the decree that had been passed upon him.

But Bharata was not yet persuaded. He made one more attempt to alter Rāma's resolve. He began by praising him highly. There was no one his equal, not merely in war, but in other things as well. His spirit was unmoved by joy or sorrow. He was burdened by no evil. Life and death, being and non-being were the same in his eyes. He was full of wisdom, noble in soul, as pure as the gods, acquainted with every secret. He therefore begged him to forgive the sin of which his mother had been guilty, and in which he himself was involved, Sovereignty had been thrust upon him in his absence. It was only the strongest sense of duty that prevented him from killing his mother. As to their father, richly endowed with religious merit and even now, as it were, a god in heaven, he did not venture to pass judgement upon him. But no one had ever heard of a more sinful act, performed at the behest of an evil minded and crafty woman. It was said that in old age men lost their understanding. And the ancient proverb had been proved true in their father's case. Now that the sin had been committed, however, it was their duty as loyal sons to conceal it, to the best of their ability, and they would earn men's approval. On the other hand, by carrying out his father's sinful decree what object would be served? Living in the woods would help nobody. It did not fit in with a kingly life. The greatest of the four orders was that of the householders.[1] How would he help his subjects by spending his days as an anchorite. Was he really obeying the call of duty when he followed after such a vague ideal. If he wanted to obtain the praises of men, then he must be willing to endure the toil and pain that

Bharata on a man's duty

[1] The four orders through which a man was supposed to pass were (1) student, (2) householder, (3) anchorite, (4) mendicant. See *The Laws of Manu*, chapters ii, iii, iv, and vi.

are involved in real kingship over the four castes. He therefore begged him once again to consent to being anointed king that very day. The priests and leading men, along with Vasishtha, were all present. The ceremony could be performed where they were, and he could return to Ayodhyā as their duly consecrated ruler to be a terror to their foes and a comfort to his people. In this way he would fully discharge the three debts[1] he owed, to the gods, to the spirits of the dead and to men, and also most effectively save their father's name and character from the charge of foolishness. Once more he urged him to listen to the cry of his friends, to have pity upon them even as the Grand Sire has pity for mankind.[2] If he would not listen, if he would not return, then Bharata also had made up his mind. If Rāma was determined to stay in the woods, Bharata would stay with him.

Rama on filial piety

To this fresh appeal Rāma answered as he had done before. Their father's command must be obeyed, their father's promise to Kaikeyi must in no way be evaded. Not only so but Bharata knew as well as he did the ancient text recited by the sage, Gaya:

> A son is born his sire to free,
> From Put's infernal pains.
> Hence saviour of his father, he
> The name of Putra gains,[3]

It is because of this text that fathers are so anxious to have sons born to them, so that one of them at least may go to the sacred town of Gayā and perform the sacred rites so necessary for the future peace and happiness of the dead. He therefore asked

[1] See *The Laws of Manu*, pp. 52, 63, 66.

[2] One of the commonest epithets for Brahmā, is pitamaha, or grandfather. It is, therefore, a reasonable deduction to call him the *great father of all*. See Dutt's translation, pp. 148.

[3] See the many references in the *Mahābhārata*, and in the *Laws of Manu* to the fact that a son (putra) is necessary to perform the funeral rites. By so doing the son rescues his father from hell (put.) A son, putra, delivers (trahyati) from put. At Gaya, in Bihār, every good Hindu ought once in his life to make funeral offerings. See Griffith's translation, which I quote, pp. 216.

him once more, to fulfil the duty that rested on him, deliver their father from the pains of hell, and thus obey the unanimous opinion of the ancient sages. It was a fair and just division of labour. Assisted by Shatrughna, Bharata to the joy of the citizens, would sit beneath the shade of the white umbrella in Ayodhyā, while Sītā, Lakshmana and he would be equally happy, beneath the shade of the trees in Dandaka forest.

Javali Intervenes

It was at this stage, that a Brāhmin philosopher, by name Jāvāli, intervened. He was evidently a man of some importance, for he is described as 'the chief of twice born sages.'[1] Jāvāli expressed his surprise that Rāma should cherish such weak and foolish ideas. A man like him, occupying such a lofty position, should not let himself be swayed by the opinions entertained by the vulgar throng. Why did he talk of the duties men owed to their kith and kin? Why should any one pay reverence to his father and mother? Man was born alone and died alone. Life was of the very briefest and we were like travellers, staying for a night in one place, and then moving on to another. At the best the link that bound us to parents, wealth and other possessions was of the most slender kind, and the wise man made little of it. It was, therefore, very foolish to choose hardship and difficulty, in obedience to what he called the demand of duty, when he had within his grasp Ayodhyā, with all the comfort and happiness that awaited him there. His father was dead, and the dead had no claim on the living. His father was one, and he was another, and if he gave up Ayodhyā for the sake of his father, he would get nothing in its place. There had been many tears shed. For his part, he wept when he thought of those who, in foolish adherence to what they thought to be their duty, involved themselves in present suffering, to obtain, not heavenly rewards, but annihilation at the hour of death. Funeral offerings, too, made day after

[1] His name appears in the list of Dasharatha's ministers.

day, with so much earnest solemnity, were just a waste of good food. Dead men did not eat. And there was no hereafter. If an oblation eaten by some person in this world passed to and benefited another, why should they not make use of the funeral sacrifices, as a contrivance for feeding their friends when on a journey. This was an easy way of feeding travellers. The whole business was invented by clever rascals, who played upon people's feelings, with a view to securing gifts and food. And so they talked about the need of worshipping the gods, about the power of gifts and of austerities, of the need of observing rites and ceremonies and denying the flesh. Seeing there was no future life, he advised the prince to listen to his counsel. Forget all about another world, enjoy the passing hour, and all that it brings. Pay heed to the things you can see and handle, to what is perceptible by the senses alone.[1]

Rama on the greatness of truth

To these ignoble appeals, Rāma replied that Jāvāli was seeking to obliterate all distinctions between good and evil, and at the same time pretending that there was justification for so doing. Was it the same thing to be pure and impure, good and bad, high-minded and base. And how could he ever hope to get to heaven, if he broke the promise he had so solemnly made. It was the duty of kings, more than of any other class of men, to cling to deeds of righteousness. Subjects followed and imitated the action of their rulers. It was truth that sustained the order of the world; it was by the power of truth that princes ruled. Truth was the foundation on which the temple of justice was reared; nay it was the source of all goodness. Without truth, the making of gifts and sacrifice, vows and austerities, yea, even the holy books of revelation, all and each were every-one of them in vain. It was truth that made our

[1] See Note 6 with its quotation from Mādhava Āchārya's *Savra-Darshana-Sangraha*, about the Chārvākas, whose sentiments agree with those of Jāvāli. In fact, the words are almost the same. See Monier Williams' *Indian Wisdom*, pp. 120, 122.

homes and our land secure. It was falsehood that plunged them into distress. And therefore, he refused to listen to appeals based on covetousness, ignorance and foolishness. Truth was the inspirer of the soul, and both the gods and the shades of the dead refused to accept the offerings made by men who were unfaithful to their plighted word. There were three stages in the progress of every sin. Born in the heart it was achieved by the hand and found its support in the tongue that spoke falsely. Jāvāli spoke with great cunning, but his proposals were dishonourable and base. However, he would not listen to them for a moment. He was well content to eat fruit and roots, enjoying the society of the gods and the spirits of his ancestors. He would achieve his object, obeying his father's command, remembering that it was by the multitude of his sacrifices that Indra obtained first place among the gods, and by their hard asceticism that the great saints of old secured the happiness of heaven. Justice, constancy, sympathy, truth, reverence for gods and Brāhmans, and the exercise of hospitality—these were the virtues that crowned a man's life with true success. He was sorry that his father had ever given Jāvāli rank and honour in his palace. He looked upon a Buddhist[1] as no better than a thief. The whole pack of them were haters of righteousness and truth. It was most unwise of kings to allow such wicked unbelievers an entrance to their presence. In the good old days, twice born men acquired fame by other methods than those of Jāvāli; and as a result their names were known and honoured still. He would walk in their path and follow their example. When Rāma had thus spoken, Jāvāli declared that he renounced his atheistic beliefs; indeed, he said that he had only assumed them for the purpose of trying to dissuade him from his purpose; because in his heart of hearts, he scorned and hated the atheists as much as any one could do.

1 The reference to Buddhism is believed to be an interpollation.

Bharata finally obeys Rama

This striking interlude was followed by another brief appeal on the part of Vasishtha, and by Bharata's declaration that he would not move from the spot where he was then seated, nor taste of food, until Rāma yielded to their prayer.[1] But when Bharata turned to the citizens and asked them to join with him in his effort, they refused and said they would not dare to do more than they had done, while Rāma solemnly rebuked his brother for making a vow that was permissible to the Brāhman caste alone. At this point, the great sages, who, as we have already seen, had come from heaven to witness the meeting of the brothers, returned to their celestial dwelling place, but before setting out, they advised Bharata to argue no further, and to carry out his brother's will.[2] Rāma was greatly delighted to hear this heavenly counsel, but Bharata was filled with fresh sorrow and fell at his brother's feet. It was, however, his last effort. Protesting his unfitness to rule he asked that he might carry with him to Ayodhyā his brother's sandals, believing that in themselves they would be able to protect the country and people in the absence of the prince. He added, however, that if Rāma did not return at the end of the fourteen years, during which time he also would live the life of a hermit, he would cast himself into the fire. Having decided to obey his brother Bharata made no further delay. Princes and queens bade each other a loving and tearful farewell. Rāma, Sītā and Lakshmana took refuge in their hermitage. Bharata and the rest mounted their elephants, chariots and horses and, followed by the army and the citizens, set out upon their homeward journey. Bharata bore the sandals aloft, placed in honour upon his brow.

[1] This refers to the practice of *dharnā*, by which men secured their desires; a species of boycott, not yet unknown in India. It is forbidden by the Indian Penal Code. For accounts of how it was employed in recent times, see Mrs. Fays' *Letters from India* No. 20, and Broughton's *Letters from a Mahratta Camp*, pp. 31.

[2] It is added that they were moved to give this advice from their desire to see the defeat of Rāvana, the ten-headed demon.

Bharata returns to Ayodhya

It was a sad and silent capital to which they returned, like the moon when she is eclipsed by the demon Rāhu; like a stream dried up in the heat of summer; like sacrificial fires perishing for lack of oil; like a battle field strewn with the bodies of the slain; like a fallen star robbed of its light. And as for the palace, it made Bharata think of the day when the gods were defeated in battle by the demons.[1] The whole situation was so distressing that Bharata could not stay in Ayodhyā, and so, with the approval of his ministers, and apparently accompanied by the whole body of citizens and his army, he went to Nandigāma. When he reached that town, his first task was to erect a royal canopy, beneath which he reverently placed his brother's sandals. At the same time he made proclamation that he would bring all matters of state and government into their sacred presence, seek their advice and govern the kingdom in patient expectation of the joyful day when they would be placed once more on Rāma's feet. Then and only then could he hope to be purged of his sins.

Rama goes to the hermitage of Atri

Not long after Bharata's departure one of the hermits came to Rāma and said that he and his companions had resolved to leave that part of the Dandaka forest The reason was that ever since Rāma had joined them, they had been subjected to every sort of cruelty and insult at the hands of wicked demons. Their sacrificial fires had been extinguished, their sacred vessels tossed about, their water jars broken, and some of the hermits had been murdered and eaten. They invited Rāma to accompany them for they were convinced that it was hatred of him that had brought the demons into their midst. The prince, however, refused to be influenced by either their arguments or fears and said that he was resolved to remain where he was. But after the hermits had

[1] In this battle the Sun was defeated by the demon Rāhu, his age-long foe. The gods persuaded Atri, the prajāpati, to undertake the management of the sun for a week.

gone, the loneliness of the place began to exercise an influence, and they too determined to seek a new place to dwell in. In the course of their wandering they came to the hermitage of Atri.[1] His wife, Anasūyā, was a lady of great ascetic merit, having spent thousands of years in the practice of the most severe penances. In particular, during a ten years drought she had been able to make fruits and roots grow, compelling the river Ganges to come and water the place where she dwelt. On another occasion, to lengthen the life of a friend, she had prolonged one night into ten. When this aged lady met Sītā, she expressed her high approval of Sītā's wifely devotion. It was a woman's duty to look upon her husband as a god and to pay him every token of respect, never asking whether he was rich or poor, virtuous or wicked. In Anasūyā's opinion there was nothing more disgraceful than for a wife to seek to rule the home. She might rest assured that heaven was the final reward of the obedient wife. To these sentiments, Sītā gave her most hearty assent saying that she would cling to her lord were he devoid of every virtue. But when he was possessed of every noble quality, it was easy to love and obey him. She would never forget the advice her mother gave her on her marriage day, setting before her as she did the noble examples of Sāvitri and Rohini.[2] Anasūyā was greatly delighted with Sītā and gave her a robe, gems and balsam. The balsam, when rubbed upon her limbs, greatly enhanced Sītā's beauty, while the robe and gems made her look like a goddess from heaven. From the devotees, who lived near the hermitage, they heard frightful tales of the hardships they had to suffer from man-eating demons. The travellers spent the night with their host and hostess, and on the following day plunged further into the depths of Dandaka forest.

[1] Atri was one of the Prajāpatis, and a mind-born son of the god Brahmā. See Note 4. Anasūyā, his wife, was a daughter of Daksha, who also was a son of Brahmā and the father-in-law of the god Shiva. Atri and his wife, in the days of Rāma, must have been not less than one million years old.

[2] See *Mahābhārata*, p. 93, for the story of Sāvitri. Rohini was the Moon's favourite wife and was always with her husband.

BOOK III

THE FOREST

On the second day after leaving the hermitage of Atri the travellers had an encounter with a terrible man-eating demon, called Virādha. He was as big as a mountain and of a most repulsive appearance. He carried a spear on which were transfixed three lions, four tigers, ten deer, two wolves and a great elephant's head, dripping with fat and gore. Raising a shout that shook the earth, Virādha laid hold of Sītā and, placing her on his hip, demanded of the other two who they were, and why they were travelling in that forest disguised as ascetics and accompanied by a woman. When he further announced that he would kill them both and make Sītā his wife, Rāma was filled with fear and began to tremble like a leaf. But on the appeal of his brother he recovered his courage and prepared for battle, demanding in turn that the demon should tell who he was and why he interfered with their progress and liberty. This the demon did with considerable detail, adding that as a result of great asceticism on his part he had obtained a boon from the god Brahmā, to the effect that he should never be killed by any weapon. And sure enough, when the fight began, it was found that Rāma's arrows passed harmlessly through the body of the fiend. Not only so, but when Virādha laughed them to scorn with wide gaping jaws, fresh arrows, which Rāma and Lakshmana launched forth like rain, came pouring out of his open mouth. His weapons, especially his mighty spear, they were able to destroy, but against himself they could do nothing. When all their shafts were sped, the two brothers, drawing their swords rushed to attack the demon at close quarters. But he was ready for these new tactics. Dropping Sītā, he seized

Rama fights with demon Viradha

the heroes and, placing one on each shoulder, began to run off with them as quickly as he could. Poor Sītā was in great distress, and called after the demon that she would consent to be his wife, if he would spare the lives of her husband and brother-in-law. To this no answer was forthcoming. The demon soon discovered, however, that he had made a fatal error; Brahmā's boon did not protect him from the attacks which were now made upon him. First Lakshmana broke his left arm, then Rāma broke his right. Overcome with the pain, Virādha fell to the ground in a faint, whereupon the brothers began to kick and beat and tear, with hands and feet, at his prostrate form. They used arrows and swords also to cut and rend his flesh. When these efforts, however, failed to deprive him of his life, they resolved to dig a pit and bury him alive. When Virādha heard them come to this decision, he expressed his great satisfaction, and proceeded to give an entirely different account of himself. He explained that up to that moment he had not realized that he was fighting with Rāma, son of Dasharatha. It seems that he was not really a demon, but a Gandharva,[1] and had been cursed by the god Kuvera, because of certain love passages he had had with Rambhā, Kuvera's daughter-in-law. This curse had changed him into a demon. But in response to his prayers Kuvera had so far relented as to say that when he met Rāma in battle and was slain by him, he would be restored to his original shape, and return to his place in heaven. He therefore invited them to cast him into the pit that they were digging. When this had been done, and earth cast over the body, it would appear that Virādha's spirit obtained release and ascended to heaven. Before he expired Virādha told the princes that they were only a few miles distant from the hermitage of Sharabhanga to which he advised them to proceed without delay.

1 The Gandharvas were attendants on the gods. Rambhā was the Apsarasa sent by Indra to tempt Vishvāmitra. We shall hear of her again in connection with Rāvana.

When they approached that sacred spot, they found that another visitor had arrived before them. He was no less a being than the god Indra, riding in a heavenly chariot. Two lovely maidens stood behind him, waving fans with handles of gold, while gods, sages, Gandharvas and Siddhas sang his praise. Rāma recognized the steeds that drew the chariot and he knew that the visitor must be a god, because his feet did not touch the earth. But when Indra saw Rāma drawing near, he bade a hurried farewell to the ascetic and, turning to the other gods, said it was desirable that they should return to heaven at once. He did not wish to meet Rāma until he had achieved his impossible task (presumably the task of killing the demon Rāvana). The heavenly visitors, headed by Indra, accordingly at once disappeared from view, and the three travellers entered the presence of Sharabhanga. When asked to explain the reason for Indra's visit, the ascetic answered that the god had come to escort him to Brahmā's heaven, as a reward for his severe austerities. But he had resolved not to quit his earthly body till he had had the privilege of looking upon Rāma's face. Now that he had done so he would not stay longer. He accordingly lighted a fire and, having poured oil upon it and repeated suitable mantras, he entered the flame. From it there issued a youth of wondrous beauty, who, mounting higher, at last passed into the presence of Brahmā, who received him with great joy.

Indra and the hermitage of Sharabhanga

In this hermitage, there lived great numbers of holy men engaged in the practice of the most severe asceticism; men who lived on air, on water, on leaves, on roots, on the rays of the moon, men who stood on one foot or sat between the five fires, or wore their clothes, dripping wet. The coming of Rāma filled them with gladness. They told him that, even as Indra was the king of heaven, so was he the king of earth. They had heard of his many virtues and noble deeds, and

The persecuted hermits

they reminded him with confidence of the duties that devolved upon a king. A king was entitled to receive one-sixth of all that his subjects possessed. But in return for that, a king must protect his subjects. If he did so, he would assuredly obtain a place in Brahmā's heaven, and he would secure for himself one-fourth of the merit acquired by the asceticism of the holy men who lived within his territories. They therefore appealed to the prince to take pity on them in their great distress. All around them lay the dead bodies of countless holy men, mostly of the Brāhmanical caste, who had been slain by cruel Rākshasas, and it was in Rāma's power to rid the earth of these wicked fiends. Rāma replied by saying the ascetics should not make such humble appeal to him. It was for them to command and for him to obey. It was indeed for this very purpose that, in obedience to his father's will, he had come to the forest, and he promised to deliver them. There was nothing he desired more.[1]

The hermitage of Sutikshna

Before his departure for heaven Sharabhanga advised Rāma to direct his footsteps to the hermitage of Sutīkshna. It appears that this ascetic also had received a visit from the god Indra, with a view to his translation to the upper world. But like his friend, he had resolved that he must first give himself the pleasure of looking upon Rāma's face. He accordingly, with great cordiality, invited Rāma to live with him in his hermitage. But the prince declined on the ground that his pursuit of game would be a grief to the ascetics who dwelt there. He further announced that on the following day, it was his intention to begin a round of visits to the various hermitages in the forest of Dandaka. Strangely enough, no mention is made of the promise given shortly before, that he would fight

[1] Commenting on the reverence paid to Rāma in this and other passages, the commentators explain, that the ascetics did so because Rāma was an incarnation of Vishnu. Otherwise, it would have been improper for a holy man to show such respect to a member of the warrior caste.

with and destroy the demons who harboured in the forest. Indeed Sutīkshna plainly says that he and his companions had no cause for alarm, except from wild beasts. On the following day's journey, however, Sītā recurred to the question, and entered a spirited protest against her husband and Lakshmana abandoning the ascetic life so far as to make war on demons. She dwelt on the fact, that the three great evils, which afflicted the world, were falsehood, adultery and bloodshed. Of the two first evils, he was absolutely free. As to the third, when he returned to Ayodhyā and re-assumed his rank as a Kshatriya, it would be a different matter. But the hermits' garb and the forest life did not accord with the carrying of weapons and thoughts of war. To illustrate her argument she told of an ascetic whose downfall was successfully plotted by Indra. The god had asked the ascetic, as a favour, to take care of a sword which he left with him. In the desire to be faithful to his trust the holy man carried the weapon about wherever he went, with the result that the mere carrying of the sword awoke in his breast cruel and bloodthirsty desires. Evil thoughts advanced to evil deeds, which finally swept him down to hell and robbed him of all his past ascetic toil. It was said by those who told this ancient tale that even as fire wrought changes in wood, so did the mere contact with weapons alter the disposition of those who wore them. Sītā made proper apologies for venturing to advise her lord and master, but nevertheless she hoped that he would weigh well the words that she had spoken. By adhering faithfully to the ascetic life and the vows that he had made he would win far greater merit and fame than the sword could ever achieve. Rāma answered very graciously, but reminded his wife that he had given a promise to the Brāhmins which he could not break. These ascetics had stated that they could destroy the demons by their curses, but curses had a way of injuring those who uttered them, and they did not wish to lose any of the merit they had so laboriously acquired. Her words were worthy of her

own sweet self, but she must not in this matter urge him further than she had done.

The lake of the five nymphs

As they continued their journey, they reached the shores of a lovely lake whose beauties filled them with admiration. From this lake they heard the sound of music, but no singers were visible. Rāma appealed to one of the ascetics in his company to explain the meaning of so miraculous a circumstance. He was told that the lake bore the name of *The Five Nymphs*, and for the following reason. A great ascetic, called Mandakarni, had spent ten thousand years on that very spot, living on air and making the stream, which flowed near by, his bed. The gods at last became alarmed, convinced that the holy man was seeking to obtain equal dignity with themselves. They therefore decided to send five beautiful Apsarases from heaven to tempt him. These women were successful in their efforts. In their society the ascetic forgot his works of penance. But he had sufficient power left to build a beautiful palace beneath the waters of the lake. In this palace he and the five ladies were still living, spending their nights and days in pleasure, and passing the time with dance and song. It was the voice of the nymphs and the sound of their musical instruments that they could hear above the waters.

Ten years pass away

The narrative now becomes very brief, for it tells us that the round of visits which Rama paid to different hermitages occupied the space of ten years. With some ascetics they passed a year, with others five or six months, with others a week or less. That is all we are told, and no mention is made of demons, or of Rāma's promise to drive them out of Dandaka forest. When the ten years had expired, Rāma, Sītā, and Lakshmana returned to the hermitage of Sutīkshna. When they had stayed a few days in that holy man's society, they told him that they had heard that the great rishi Agastya lived somewhere in the neighbourhood, and they would greatly like to pay him a visit. Sutīkshna

urged them to do so. After a journey of about fifty or sixty miles, the travellers recognized the hermitage from the description that had been given them. Great piles of wood and heaps of sacred grass were gathered about the door, and the smoke of the sacred fire rose high in the heavens. As they approached the sacred spot, they reminded one another of the great deeds Agastya had performed in days gone by. In particular, they told how the wicked fiend, Ilwala, assuming the guise of a Brāhmin and speaking Sanskrit, had gone to live among Brāhmins in the forest. One day he invited these Brāhmins to a funeral feast. At this feast, having transformed his brother Vātāpi into a ram, he slew the transformed sheep, and cooking its flesh, set it before his Brāhmin guests. When the feast was over, with a loud shout, the demon called for his brother, 'Vātāpi, Vātāpi, come out!' When he heard his brother's voice, Vātāpi, bleating like a sheep, issued from the bodies of the Brāhmins, rending their bodies in fragments as he came. It was said that thousands of Brāhmins were, at different times, and after this manner, deprived of their lives by the wicked cunning of the two brothers. But the cruel fiends at last met their match. Agastya was invited to one of their funeral feasts, and Vātāpi, in the guise of a sheep, was set before him, evidently as his solitary meal. When the feast was over and the whole sheep entirely consumed, Ilwala, as he had done on previous occasions, called aloud, 'Vātāpi. Vātāpi, come out.' But it was too late. Agastya laughed and said, 'Your brother can't come out now. I've digested him, and he has already departed for the abodes of death.' Ilwala was exceedingly angry and sought to kill the rishi. But that was impossible. The fire of Agastya's anger blazed forth from his eyes and changed the demon into dust.[1]

[1] The *Mahābhārata* has many references to Agastya. See *Mahābhārata* pp. 20, 76, 83, 104, 160, 206, 240.

Hermitage of Agastya

The hermitage of Agastya was situated near the Vindhya hills, which, in obedience to the saint's command had stopped growing any higher, so as not to obstruct the sun's rays. It was frequented by gods, Gandharvas and other more or less celestial beings. When they had entered its confines, the travellers were greatly interested to observe the places where the following gods held their seat, when they came thither: Brahmā, Agni, Vishnu, Indra, Soma, Bhaga, Vāyu, Varuna, Dhātā, Vidhata, Shiva, the Gāyatrī verse, the Vasus, Kartikeya, Dharma, Vāsuki the king of serpents and Garuda the king of birds. Agastya expressed the greatest pleasure at seeing Rāma and folded him to his breast, while the prince and his companions paid reverence to the ascetic by grasping his feet. When the proper offerings, suitable to a guest, had been made and they had asked about one another's welfare, Agastya presented Rāma with the bow, quiver, sword and spear of the god Vishnu. As to Sītā, he was kind enough to say that she was not like other women. Since they were first created women had been very fickle-minded, faithful enough in times of prosperity, but in the hour of sorrow as unstable as lightning and as uncertain as the wind. Soon after their arrival Rāma asked the saint to point out to them a suitable place where they might spend the remaining years of their exile. They would like to settle in a well-wooded and well-watered country, free from trouble and anxiety. They were told that some thirty miles away they would find such a spot, Panchavatī,[1] near the river Godāvari. Having received Agastya's permission to depart the travellers continued their journey without further delay.

They had not travelled far when they met a large vulture. When they asked the vulture who he was, he replied that he was a friend of their father Dasharatha, by name Jatāyus. In conversation he

[1] Identified with *Nasik* in the Bombay Presidency, so called because it was there that Rāma cut off the nose (nasika) of Shurpanakhā.

dwelt at length on the origin of gods, demons, beasts, trees and men, all of whom were descended from Kashyapa, one of the Prajāpatis or lord of creatures. He himself was seven generations distant from that distinguished person. According to Jatāyus, Kashyapa married no less than eight daughters of Daksha, one of the fellow Prajāpatis, and from these, apparently, all living things obtained their birth. *Aditi*, for instance, was the mother of the thirty-three gods, the Adityas, the Vasus, the Rudras and the Ashwins. *Diti*, the second wife, was mother of the demons or Daityas, who in former ages ruled the world. *Tāmrā* was the mother of five daughters who, in turn, gave birth to such creatures as cranes, owls, vultures, hawks, bears, monkeys, elephants, and lions. Another wife was the mother of trees. Garuda, the king of birds and the eight elephants which uphold the world had similar origins, while, most interesting of all, *Manu* was the mother of men. From her mouth the Brāhmins were born, from her breast the Kshatriyas, from her thighs the Vaishyas, and from her feet the Shudras. [1]

The vulture Jatayus on the work of creation

When he had finished his story of the work of creation, Jatāyus proposed that he should accompany the travellers and in particular act as Sītā's guardian, while the princes were indulging in the pleasures of the chase. Rāma cordially agreed to this offer, as he had often heard his father speak of his friendship with the kingly vulture. By this time they had reached Panchavatī where, on the advice of Agastya, they had resolved to spend the few remaining years of their exile. They at once began to build a cottage. Its walls were made of beaten earth, the roof was of

Panchavati their final resting place

[1] For further discussion of this remarkable account of creation, see *Note 4*. The reader will observe, with surprise. that the name, *Manu*, is here given to a woman. As every one knows, Manu was the great rishi who after the flood re-created the world and filled it afresh with gods, demons and men. It is more usual to say of Kashyapa that he was a son of the Prajāpati Marīchi son of Brahmā.

bamboos and branches, covered with sacred grass, leaves and reeds. When their task was complete, they bathed in the waters of the Godāvari, and presented offerings to the gods. The days of winter were now arrived, winter which fills the hearts of men with gladness and makes them eager to sit round a fire. [1]

The giantess Shurpanakha

But alas! few days of peace remained to the exiles. Because not long after their arrival a terribly ugly giantess, named Shurpanakhā, and a sister of Rāvana and Khara, approached the cottage. The moment her eyes fell on Rāma her heart was pierced with the darts of love. When questioned as to who she was she frankly told her name and lineage. But from that she quickly passed to make the unabashed proposal that Rāma should abandon such an ugly and withered hag as Sītā was, and join himself to her, as a more worthy and lovely bride. Rāma apparently thought it expedient to humour the infatuated fiend. Professing that he was afraid of Sītā's jealousy, he advised her to choose Lakshmana instead. Lakshmana, so far, had never married.[2] He was young, handsome and brave, and with him she was sure to be happy. Evidently not unwilling Shurpanakhā turned to Lakshmana. That youth, resolved to follow the line of action which his brother had chosen, professed that he was unworthy of so great an honour. He was himself nothing but his brother's slave. Was she content to marry a slave? He therefore advised her to keep to her first intention and marry Rāma. Sītā was getting old and ugly, and the prince would be only too glad to desert her for one so beautiful as she was. The foolish she-fiend was so infatuated as to believe that Lakshmana was speaking truth and rushed at Sītā, declaring as she did so that she would eat her up without a moment's delay. Poor Sītā was filled with dread, but her husband at

1 The reader is invited to make himself acquainted with Mr. Griffith's fine version of the poet's description of the winter season. It is probably the best illustration of Valmīki's deep love for Nature.

2 But we are told in Book I that he married Urimila and Sītā speaks of his marriage to Anasūyā in Book II. c. 118.

once interposed. Lakshmana was commanded to cut off the foul creature's ears and nose. Wounded and bleeding profusely, Shūrpanakhā took refuge in flight and never halted till she reached Janasthān, that part of the Dandaka forest where her brother Khara with many thousands of his demon followers dwelt. Casting herself at her brother's feet she told the story of her wrongs and called for vengeance. As he listened to his sister's story Khara was filled with fury. Protesting that even the god Indra would not dare to insult him or any one belonging to his family, he summoned fourteen of his fiercest demon followers, and bade them go and slay Sītā and the two princes. But it is needless to tell that Rāma without the aid of Lakshmana vanquished and slew them with the greatest ease. Shūrpanakhā had accompanied them and when she saw them die hurried once more to her brother's presence. This time she taunted Khara with cowardice, said it was plain that he had no chance of victory against Rāma, and advised him to clear out of Dandaka forest as quickly as he could.

Her brother Khara attacks Rama

These taunts had the desired effect. This time Khara called not fourteen, but fourteen thousand demons to his presence, and attended by his most valiant captains, under the leadership of his brother, Dushan, set out for Panchavatī. Khara himself travelled in a glorious car. The car shone with gold and precious stones, and was ornamented with figures of flowers, trees, birds, and fishes. The minds of the demons were greatly perturbed by a great variety of evil omens. The animals, which drew Khara's car, more than once stumbled and fell, although the ground was free from all encumbrance. Dark clouds darkened the sun, and before their journey was ended it had suffered an eclipse. Vultures rose in the air with doleful cries, jackals howled, the trees were stripped of flowers and leaves. Great clouds of dust filled the heavens, despite the fact that the wind had ceased to blow. Streams ran dry. Shooting stars darted across

the sky. Birds, beasts and fishes died. And worst of all Khara's left arm began to throb. This multiplication of woes made his hair stand on end, but he was determined to defy Fate. He boastingly declared that he could bring down the stars from heaven, vanquish Death himself, and put the great god Indra, to flight. As Khara and his hosts approached the hermitage, the gods, accompanied by Gandharvas and sages, gathered in great numbers to witness the approaching battle. Their united prayer was that Rāma might be victorious and bring joy to Brāhmins and cows. Nevertheless, we are told that their hearts were filled with fear and terror, so doubtful were they as to the issue, when they saw the mighty hosts marshalled against Rāma's single arm. Happily no anxiety filled the mind of Rāma. He too saw the omens, but they did not terrify him. His left arm also throbbed, but it was a token of defeat for those opposed to him. And he had other omens of his own. His arrows were tipped with clouds of white smoke, and his bow was possessed by a strange tremor, not of fear, but of exultation. Despite his confidence, he was naturally anxious about Sītā. He sent her to a neighbouring cave, escorted by Lakshmana, and resolved to fight alone.

Rama single handed, destroys Khara and his army

It is unnecessary to give the details of the combat. When Rāma, single handed, had slain the fourteen thousand fiends, Dushan ordered five thousand others to advance. It is to be remembered that Rama had received a number of heavenly weapons from Agastya, and it would appear that he was able to discharge not one, but thousands of arrows, with one stretching of his bow. The giants, on the other hand, not only used iron weapons, but uprooted trees and dug out rocks, which they hurled at their foe. When the five thousand had been slain, Dushan himself intervened, but he too, as well as the other fiendish officers, were quickly despatched to the abodes of Yama. Khara himself had so far taken no part in the fight. The loss of all his army had a depressing

effect upon him and he was filled with fear. Nevertheless, he advanced boldly against Rāma and discharged so many arrows that the sun was darkened. In describing the previous contests it is said Rāma felt the blows of his assailants no more than if they were the caress of flowers. But in fighting with Khara he was very severely wounded and lost a great deal of blood. The ardour of battle did not prevent him however from discoursing at length on the evil deeds of Khara and his demons, and pointing out that sin never went unpunished.[1] But the prince had manifestly a difficult task before him, and he did not succeed in putting Khara to death, until he had called to his aid both the staff of Brahmā and Vishnu's bow. Khara's overthrow afforded the gods the greatest satisfaction. They joined in singing Rāma's praise. The drums of heaven began to beat and lovely flowers were showered upon his head. Agastya, too, appeared on the scene and congratulated the hero on having cleared the demons out of Dandaka forest and restored peace and safety to the hermits dwelling there. In so doing he had fulfilled the purpose of the gods. Lakshmana and Sītā next emerged from their place of retreat, and it is impossible to describe the joy the latter felt at finding her husband alive and well.

But alas! their joy was shortlived. One of the giants, named Akampan, somehow managed to escape. Hastening to Lankā, the capital of Rāvana, he told the demon king how Khara and all the demon host had been destroyed. Words cannot describe the wrath of Rāvana. He could not believe that there was any one in heaven, earth or hell who would dare to oppose him. Indra, Vishnu, Kuvera and Yama, the mightiest of all the gods, everyone of them knew and trembled at his power. And he asked if any of the gods had assisted Rāma in the battle. But the fugitive explained that the prince had achieved the victory by his own unaided strength.

Ravana informed

[1] In speaking of Rāma's rage, the poet more than once compares him to Shiva at the famous sacrifice of Daksha. See *Note 7*.

Neither gods nor heavenly hosts had taken part in the combat.[1] He needed no one's help. The very stars of heaven would fall victims to his relentless bow. When he saw that Rāvana was resolved to go and chastise Rāma, Akampan urged him not to go. It was striving after the impossible. Gods and demons combined could not overthrow Dasharatha's son. One might as well try to obtain heaven by evil-doing. But he suggested a subtler plan, and that was to carry off Sītā from the hermitage in the absence of her husband and brother-in-law. Such a plan might succeed, and was well worth attempting. Because Sītā was the loveliest of womenkind; there was not a goddess in heaven to compare with her. And once robbed of Sītā Rāma would quickly die of grief.

Ravana resolves to carry off Sita

This proposal commended itself to the mind of the demon king, and he made immediate preparation for his departure. He travelled in his air chariot, a most wonderful contrivance, formerly the property of the god Kuvera. It was drawn by goblin-faced asses, which apparently were able to travel through the air. A later passage tells how the travellers looked down from their lofty seat on lakes and rivers, cities, hills and forests. They saw, too, hermits, saints, Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Nāgas, heavenly birds, a great variety of semi-divine beings whose names are given, gods, goddesses and Dānavas. Where these celestial beings were exactly is not explained. Some were evidently enjoying the beauties of nature, others seemed to be using chariots like his own.[2] He saw the famous fig-tree on which Garuda, the king of birds, rested on the famous day when he carried off the elephant and tortoise, one in each claw.[3]

[1] Rāvana's question about the gods reminds us of the boon granted by Brahmā, as a reward for his asceticism, that he should never be overcome by either gods or demons.

[2] These cars, like Rāvana's, were 'capable of coursing at will.'

[3] The Kinnaras were men with horses' heads. The Nāgas were celestial snakes. The Gandharvas were the minstrels of heaven. The semi divine beings included *Vālakhilyas*, which, according to the Vishnu Purāna, are 'no bigger than the joint of a thumb, chaste, pious and resplendent as the rays of the sun.' It is strange to find the Dānavas, or race of demons, associated with the gods. The story of Garuda and the elephant and tortoise will be found in *Mahābhārata*. p. 28.

At last he reached the dwelling place of his friend, Mārīcha. Of this fiend we have already heard and of how, at the request of Vishvāmitra, Rāma engaged him in battle and cast him into the sea. Mārīcha was now spending his days in the guise of an ascetic and was greatly alarmed when Rāvana invited his assistance in an attack on Rāma's queen. He frankly declared that it was an impossible proposal, and after some discussion persuaded Rāvana to give up the attempt, return to Lankā and be content with the wives he had already. The demon king, when he got back to Lankā, however, found that he must reckon with his sister, Shūrpanakhā. At this point the poem gives an interesting account of what the demon was like, and of the wars that he had waged against gods and hermits. Gods and Gandharvas, we are told, had fought against him to no purpose. True, they had wounded him grievously, and the scars could still be seen on his immense body, his ten heads and twenty arms. In particular, we are informed that his power was due to the fact that he had spent ten thousand years in the practice of the most severe asceticism, and as a reward had been promised by the god, Brahmā, that neither god nor demon, neither Gandharva, bird nor snake, should be able to deprive him of his life. There was one exception. Apparently Rāvana had thought it beneath his dignity to ask for such a boon. He had not asked to be saved from death at the hands of a mortal. It was such a mighty being that his sister, Shūrpanakhā, who had by this time arrived at Lankā, dared to taunt with cowardice, when she saw him return with his promise unfulfilled. She gave utterance to a great many fine phrases on the duties of a king. The ruler who did not attend to the welfare of his subjects and abandoned them in the hour of danger would soon find that he had no followers left. If he listened to the advice of others, unfit to give advice, he was no better than a slave. His kingdom would pass from him if he did not learn to distinguish between good and evil. It was his duty to take vengeance. And by taking vengeance in

the way she proposed, he would gratify himself. Her plan was the same as Akampan's. Sītā was incomparably beautiful, and in the enjoyment of her love he would be happier than the god Indra.

These biting words had the desired effect, and Shūrpanakhā had the satisfaction of seeing her brother set out a second time for the continent of India. And in the first instance he once more sought the hermitage of Mārīcha.[1] The disguised ascetic was as unwilling as he had been before to co-operate with Rāvana in the rape of Sītā. It was a case of Satan quoting Scripture, but for a good purpose. Kings brought ruin on their subjects when they gave way to passion, and he was sure that, if he consulted his ministers, they would advise him to take no further action. Best to be content with what he had. In attempting to gain more he would lose all. Rāma was the incarnation of every virtue, and was lord of the whole earth. He might as well try to steal the sun out of the sky. Rāma was the very god of death and could not be conquered. Mārīcha then told of his own experiences with Rāma. At that time Rāma was a boy, twelve years old, and yet he had lifted the fiend and thrown him into the sea,[2] which was seven hundred miles distant. After a slow recovery Mārīcha had returned to his old ways of life, haunting Dandaka forest, killing the hermits who lived there, and eating their flesh. But one day he had encountered Rāma a second time, and the very sight of the hero had so possessed his soul with terror that he fled from the spot, resolved to give the rest of his days to the practice of asceticism. Despite all his efforts, he was still afraid, and even now, after so many years, in every bush and tree he seemed to see not one but a thousand Rāmas. In the night season horrid visions afflicted him, and he awoke from dreams in which Rāma seemed to pursue him. He could not endure to hear people speak of rath (chariots) and ratn

Maricha's good advice

[1] It looks as if the first interview with Mārīcha was an interpolation.
[2] Book I. c. 32. where it is said Rāma was in his sixteenth year.

(jewels) because these words began with the same letter as Rāma's name. Unfortunately these arguments failed to convince the demon king. He was not afraid of the gods, why should he be afraid of a man, and in particular of a cowardly fool, who at the demand of a woman had left his kingdom to wander an exile in the forest? If Mārīcha would help him to steal away Sītā, then he would give him half of his kingdom. If he refused, he would kill him there and then. These threats had apparently no influence upon Mārīcha, and he boldly declared that the demon king would bring speedy ruin upon himself, his family and kingdom by the evil deed he proposed to do. The crime of adultery was the greatest of all sins. He had more than a thousand wives already and he should be satisfied with that number. Alas! many innocent people would suffer for his foolishness. Unfortunately kings often refused to listen to good advice and plunged their subjects into distress and misery. But seeing he was doomed to die in any case, perish at the hands of Rāvana if he refused to assist him, or perish at the hand of Rāma if he assisted Rāvana, he preferred to choose death at Rāma's hand. He therefore, very illogically closed his statement by saying that he would obey his monarch's behest. Rāvana was greatly delighted at this unexpected decision. He took Mārīcha in his arms, and said that he was now listening to the real Māīrcha, who spoke as a true hero should. The plan he proposed was a very simple one. Mārīcha, in virtue of his demoniacal powers, was able to assume any shape at will, and he was asked to change himself into a beautiful deer. Rāvana was convinced that, when she saw the deer, Sītā would ask her husband and Lakshmana to secure it for her. In their eager pursuit of the animal, which would run off into the depths of the forest, the brothers would leave Sītā alone and unprotected. In their absence Rāvana would seize his opportunity, take possession of the lady, and placing her in his aero-plane, carry her off to Lankā.

Maricha assumes the guise of a deer and deceives Rama

When the two demons got near the hermitage, Mārīcha at once assumed the form proposed, and began to graze quietly within full view of the three exiles. Sītā, attracted by its beauty, asked her husband to secure it for her. Lakshmana at once interposed and said that he thought the animal was too beautiful to be a real deer. He would not be surprised if it were indeed Mārīcha in disguise. He had heard of kings being similarly deceived by that wicked fiend. But Sītā turned his objections scornfully aside. She urged her husband to go and capture it. If he could take it alive so much the better. It would be a very nice gift for Bharata and the queens, when they got back to Ayodhyā. If he had to kill it, then the skin would make a beautiful and comfortable seat. Rāma could not resist his wife's pleadings, and he told his brother that if the deer was indeed Mārīcha in disguise, it would be a virtuous act to kill him, and free the hermits of the forest from one of their most cruel oppressors. He therefore asked Lakshmana to keep careful guard of Sītā in his absence, making use of the services of Jatāyus, and himself set off in pursuit of the animal. But the deer was wonderfully swift of foot, and by its artifice led the hero far away from home. Rāma grew both angry and tired. The animal time and again disappeared from view, and when the prince had almost decided to abandon the chase, Rāma fitted a Brahmā weapon to his bow, and smote the creature to the heart. But in its dying agony, it achieved its wicked purpose. Assuming the very voice and accent of Rāma, it called out with its latest breath, 'Help Sītā, Help Lakshmana!' And now, when it was too late. Rāma's eyes were opened to the truth. Should Lakshmana hear that cry of agony, he would come running to his help and leave Sītā alone—leave her alone with no one to protect her. His heart was filled with terror at the thought of what might happen.

And it happened even as Rāma feared. Both Sītā and Lakshmana heard the call for help.

Greatly alarmed, Sītā urged Lakshmana to hasten at once to his brother's rescue. To her amazement, Lakshmana refused to go. He said that he had been ordered to stay by her side. Rāma was more than a match for both gods and demons. It was as he suspected; Mārīcha had imitated the voice of the prince. Sītā would not listen to any argument or reason. She was so foolish even as to suggest that, because of an unholy passion for herself, Lakshmana wished his brother to be killed. These taunts led him to indulge in the usual diatribes against the fickleness and envy of womenkind. But Sītā answered with a flood of tears, protesting that if Rāma had perished, she would drown himself or hang herself or drink poison, or cast herself into the fire but one thing she would not do. She would never marry another man of baser qualities.[1] When he saw that his words were of no avail, Lakshmana, with the greatest reluctance, set off in search of his brother.

Lakshmana goes to Rama's help

All this time, for some unexplained reason, no mention is made of Sītā's other protector, the vulture Jatāyus. We learn afterwards that the bird had gone to sleep. The field was therefore clear for Rāvana. He approached the hermitage, not in his proper form as a ten-headed demon, but in the guise of a hermit. Believing him to be indeed one of the twice-born Sītā received him with the usual rites of hospitality; a dish of cooked rice was set before him and water to wash his feet. In language scarcely suited to one who looked so like a saint, Rāvana expressed his admiration for Sītā's beauty. He had not seen among the goddesses of heaven anyone to equal her. Was she related to the Rudras, Vasus or Maruts? It was not usual to find one so lovely living in the forest unguarded and alone. Was she not afraid of wild beasts, and of the still more fearful demons who surrounded her

Sita carried off by Ravana

[1] This passage would indicate that re-marriage was not forbidden, and that the practice of Satī had at least alternatives, for showing a widow's grief.

hermitage? Remembering that ascetics were apt to curse those who happened to offend them, Sītā meekly told her questioner who she was and why her husband and she had been condemned to live in exile. Having told her own story she requested the ascetic to tell, in turn, who he was and the reason of his coming. This he did and without further concealment. He was Rāvana, the ten-headed king of the Rākshasas. He was step-brother to Kuvera, the god of wealth. Gods and men, Asuras, snakes, birds and beasts trembled at his presence. Even the elements were afraid of him and the sun grew pale when he was near. The winds ceased to blow, the waves of the sea were stilled. He bade her think no more of Rāma and come with him to Lankā where five-thousand maidens would answer other call. He had already one-thousand queens, all of them beautiful, but he would think no more of any of them when she was seated by his side. With these words, Rāvana, casting aside his hermit's guise, assumed his natural and awful form as a ten-headed Rakshasa. Seizing Sītā, he placed her in his car and mounted high into the air. The poor princess called aloud for help. She begged the river, Godāvari, the birds and deer, the gods and spirits, who dwelt in the forest, to tell her husband by whom she had been carried off. And last of all, noting the vulture Jatāyus, perched on a tree, she entreated him to acquaint the brothers with the calamity which had befallen her.

Jatayus to the rescue

Her words awoke the bird, who, as has been said had fallen asleep at the most critical hour. It did not occur to Sītā that the vulture could offer any real protection. But, despite the fact that he was no less than sixty-thousand years old, the animal boldly advanced to the rescue. To begin with he tried what argument could do. Observing that he was well acquainted with the teaching of the Purānas, he pointed out how highly improper the demon's conduct was. Every one expected that a king, whose duty it was to enforce

the law against others, would keep it himself. Yet here he was bringing disgrace on his reputation by stealing another man's wife. This conduct was particularly unjust in view of the fact that it was directed against a brother monarch. He was trying to tie a poisonous snake with a piece of cloth. He was fastening death's halter round his own neck. Rāma would most assuredly destroy him. No chopping of logic could avert the eternal truths contained in the books of revelation. Old as he was he would not allow him to commit so great a wrong. With that, Jatāyus leaped upon Rāvana and attacked him vigorously with both beak and talons. In return the Rākshasa discharged against the vulture a perfect cloud of arrows. It is said that each arrow was adorned with diamonds and pearls. For a time it looked as if the vulture would be victorious. With his talons he broke Rāvana's bow; with his wings, his shield; and finally the car itself was torn to pieces. An equally disastrous fate befell the goblin-headed asses, the driver and various other attendants, who were seated in the aeroplane. Rāvana himself fell down to earth, but he did not loosen his hold on Sītā. The heavenly witnesses, who had been watching the fight, were greatly elated at this victory and cried out in praise of Jatāyus. But his great effort had exhausted the aged bird. And when Rāvana mounted up again into the air, bearing the lady in his arms, he had as it were to begin the contest anew. Nevertheless a fresh success attended his efforts and he managed to wrench off the ten left arms of the demon. Unfortunately ten other arms immediately burst forth to take the places of those that had been destroyed. It was impossible to fight longer with such a wonderful fiend. And ere long, with feet and wings shorn off by Rāvana's sword, the only weapon now left to him, Jatāyus fell to the ground mortally wounded.

It is said that Rāvana had been holding Sītā closely clasped to his bosom with one of his left arms. But we are now told that when Sītā saw her champion

fall, she rushed forward and cast herself upon his prostrate form. The demon, however, seized her with great rudeness and flew up into the air. This outrage upon the lady filled the universe with shocked surprise. The sun was darkened, the winds ceased to blow, while the god Brahmā in solemn tones declared that the evil deed, decreed of old, had now been accomplished. The hermits of the forest were filled with sorrow. And yet they were not able altogether to suppress their joy, for the outrage was the final guarantee that ere long Rāvana would be destroyed. There were many tokens of nature's sympathy. The trees whispered words of comfort. The beasts of the field came forth and gazed sadly upwards. The mountains and hills shed tears, which flowed down their sides in streams and waterfalls. In her struggles to be free, several of Sītā's ornaments slipped from her graceful form. As they flashed to the ground, they were like the spirits of men who, when they have exhausted their stock of heavenly merit, return to earth in the shape of falling stars, or like the river Ganges as she descends from the upper air by the ordinance of the gods. Poor Sītā, as they journeyed through the air, looked on every side for signs of some deliverer. At last she saw five monkeys standing on a hill top. Unknown to Rāvana she unloosed her mantle from her shoulders and cast it down with a variety of ornaments and gems right into their midst. Her hope was that by means of them the monkeys would be able to identify her and inform Rāma in what direction she had gone.

Nature's sorrow

Soon after Rāvana and his captive arrived in Lankā the poor lady was compelled to journey from room to room of the demon's gorgeous palace. His hope was that the sight of his wealth and power would rouse her cupidity and make her willing to forget her lord. Finally when he pleaded for her love, he so far humbled himself as to kneel before her and to place his ten heads beneath her feet. But his words were of no

Sita a prisoner in Lanka

avail. She would never forget, she said, her peerless spouse whom she would always worship as a god. She knew that Rāvana's life was safe from the power of gods and demons. But his doom was approaching at the hands of a mortal. To end the discussion she placed a blade of grass between them and ordered him to advance no further. These words so excited the anger of Rāvana, that he told her if she did not yield herself to him within a certain time, he would cause his cooks to cut her to pieces and serve her up for his morning meal. Calling a number of female Rākshasas he bade them use every sort of blandishment and threat to break her will. In obedience to the royal command these demons carried Sītā off to a garden called Ashoka. In her great sorrow and loneliness Sītā was not forgotten by the gods. Brahmā himself addressed Indra on the subject. He pointed out that Sītā was undergoing this great suffering for the sake of the three worlds and for the destruction of the demons. But he was afraid that Sītā would die of grief, unless they took some immediate action. He therefore requested Indra to go to Lankā accompanied by the goddess of sleep. Indra gladly agreed to do so. He also took with him some rice cooked in clarified butter. When the two deities reached Lankā, the goddess of sleep cast the whole Rākshasa community into a deep slumber, which enabled Indra to interview the lady without any possibility of interruption. On the god declaring who he was Sītā was at first afraid that she was being deceived once more by a demon able to assume any disguise he chose. She therefore requested the god to give a sign that he was indeed one of the rulers of the upper world. Indra at once consented to do so. The signs he showed were two in number. He did not touch the ground with his feet and his eyes never winked. Thus satisfied Sītā willingly ate the rice which he offered her. Indra explained that when she did so she would lose all sense of either hunger or thirst. The food had an instantaneous effect. Not only her hunger and thirst passed

away, but her spirits revived. She humbly and reverently gave the god thanks for his goodness, and declared that all anxiety as to the future had been removed from her mind. The king of gods was her own and her husband's friend and protector. Having accomplished this good work, and with many farewells to the princess, Indra and the goddess of sleep went back to heaven.

Rama's grief

The scene now changes to the forest, and what happened after Rāma was startled by the dying cry of the demon, Mārīcha. As he hastened, as quickly as he could in the direction of the cottage, his anxiety was increased by hearing a jackal cry. His left eye and his left arm, and his heart also, began to throb while flocks of birds and herds of deer moved round him from the left and uttered mournful cries. He had travelled far when he encountered his brother, driven by the foolish reproaches of Sītā to come to his rescue. All Rāma's fears were confirmed. Sītā had been indeed abandoned and there could be no longer any doubt. Evil fiends had already killed her and consumed her tender flesh. And sure enough, when the brothers arrived at the cottage, they found it empty. Many pages of the poem are devoted to describing Rāma's sorrow. Lakshmana was subjected to biting censure. He could only reply that he had left Sītā most unwillingly. He had told her that Rāma could wage successful war against all the gods combined under the leadership of Indra, able to save them from defeat. It was not within the bounds of possibility that Rāma should call aloud for help. Some wicked fiend had imitated his voice and accent. Rāma's answer to this excuse was complete. If Lakshmana was so convinced that his brother could not suffer harm at the hand of any foe, why did he listen to the foolish taunts of a love-sick woman and leave her unprotected and alone. Having argued the matter thus they began to search everywhere. Rāma begged the flowers, mentioning them each by name, to tell him where Sītā was. At

times he thought he saw her hiding among the trees, and rushed forward to take her in his arms. Again he was convinced that she was making sport of them to try the greatness of his love. Time and again he would return to the cottage, after a search, in the hope that she had come back in his absence. And yet again, he would abandon his search as hopeless, and cast himself in despair upon the ground. He conjured up the reproaches of Sītā's parents, and their grief at her death. He declared that Kaikeyi had achieved her purpose at last. For he would never have the courage to return to Ayodhyā. The people would denounce him for his cowardice, as a man unable to protect his wife from the arms of a foe. There was one thing of which he was convinced; there was no one so full of sin as he was. He was the greatest of all sinners. And he was now reaping the fruit of the evil deeds he had committed in a former birth. His father's death, his exile, his separation from his mother and kinsfolk, were all tokens that he was being punished for his sins. In the enjoyment of Sītā's society he had not appreciated these facts as he should, but now with Sītā's death they were more than renewed, and burst forth afresh like a fire on which more fuel is cast.

The search for Sita

With these words he got up from the ground and set out again to search beneath every tree and bush, through valleys and ravines. This time he appealed to the sun, whose eyes behold the good and evil that men do, to the wind from whom nothing is concealed and to the river Godāvari. But no answer came. It is said that the river would have liked to answer, but she was afraid. He was more successful with the deer, because when these animals saw his burning tears, they got up from the ground, gazed towards the south and eventually began to move in that direction. This was an omen too valuable to be neglected; and when the brothers had followed the deer for some distance, they found first of all a garland, made of

flowers which Rāma himself had gathered. Proceeding further they reached the spot where the fight had taken place between Rāvana and the vulture. Before them lay some of Sitā's ornaments, the ruins of the aeroplane, the broken bow, a multitude of arrows[1] and the dead bodies of the goblin-faced asses, and of the charioteer. The footprints of a giant could easily be discerned. Rāma formed the opinion that two giants had fought one another to gain Sītā as a prize. He does not seem to have thought of Rāvana as the culprit, while no reference is made to Jatāyus whose absence so far had called for no remark.

Rama's anger at the gods

It was now proved beyond doubt that Sītā had been carried off by some wicked fiend, and they had cause to fear that she was already dead. This thought filled Rāma with uncontrollable wrath. He had already threatened a mountain to the effect that if it did not tell him where Sītā was, he would reduce it to ashes, and the river Godāvari that he would dry up her waters if she persisted in keeping silence. His anger now blazed forth against the gods themselves. Putting an arrow to his bow he vowed that he would destroy the three worlds if the gods did not give him back Sītā. Sun and moon, mountains, rivers, trees, every kind of spirit, good and bad, gods, demons and men, he would destroy them all. None would be saved from his righteous indignation if he did not get back Sītā. In the past he had taken pity on the weak, and sought everyone's good. He supposed that was the reason why the gods had held him in contempt, even as others in their ignorance pay no heed to the creator when he shows himself compassionate, although he is the best of all the gods. But his nature, he said, was now completely changed, He would be absolutely without pity. He had one object in life, to obtain vengeance for the loss of his blameless spouse. He knew that, by the decree of fate, the universe was

[1] The arrows had feathers of gold and were four hundred finger lengths in measurement. There was also golden armour lying about.

destined to perish, in the great dissolution of all things, but he would anticipate that awful day, and before another sun had set, the three worlds, with all they contained, would be swept out of existence.

Lakshmana protests

Lakshmana was greatly shocked by these awful threats, and he pointed out to his brother that it was improper to punish the three worlds and all their inhabitants, because some one person, unknown, had done him so great a wrong. All his investigations had only confirmed him in his opinion that Sītā was the victim of one individual, and of one individual only. He had been distinguished in the past, for his gentleness and patience. He must not cast away what had been his most pre-eminent virtue. It was, besides, the special duty of kings to see to it, that the innocent did not suffer with the guilty; and he was sure that neither gods nor Dānavas nor Gandharvas, neither rivers nor seas nor mountains approved of the evil deed. Let them, however, set out at once and explore every nook and cranny of earth and heaven. They would never rest until they found out who had carried off Sītā. If, at the end of their labours, they discovered that the gods had not restored her, and that their prayers and self-control were all in vain, he would not seek to hold him back. To these wise words Lakshmana added others by way of consolation. He must not forget that suffering was the lot of every man who came into the world. And if Rāma could not bear up against this sorrow which had befallen him, how were ordinary weak mortals to withstand the anxiety of grief. Let him look to the experience of the race. There was Yayāti, for example; he attained to the rank of a god, but eventually was cast out of heaven. There was Vasishtha, their father's family priest, who lost his hundred sons in one day.[1] They knew also how mother earth was rent with the pangs of earthquake, and both the sun and moon were robbed of their strength in

[1] For story of Yayāti, see *Mahābhārata*, p. 22. Vasishtha's loss of his 100 sons is told in an earlier passage in this poem.

seasons of eclipse. And, looking higher, let him think of the gods themselves. Everyone of them experienced joy and sorrow and were subject to the control of fate. It was not for him who had so often benefited by his counsel to offer advice, nevertheless he ventured to urge his brother not to weaken his spirit further by over indulgence in useless grief.

They find the dying Jatayus

In obedience to his brother's counsel Rāma once more set out upon his search. They had not proceeded far when they found Jatāyus, lying on the ground and bleeding profusely. At first Rāma thought that the vulture had been the cause of Sītā's death and, fitting an arrow to his bow, was about to slay the poor animal. But Jatāyus interrupted him with a piteous cry, and Rāma quickly learned how great a debt of gratitude he owed to his dying friend. In particular he learned that it was Rāvana who had robbed him of his queen. Rāma was so overcome by the narrative he heard that he cast his arms around the bird and pressed him to his breast.[1] It was fortunate that the princes came when they did, because soon after their arrival Jatāyus breathed his last. This was a fresh sorrow for Rāma. Indeed he declared that he felt it even more than the loss of Sītā, especially because the bird had suffered for her sake. One often observed, that noble and righteous spirits were to be found in all grades of the animal creation, even among birds. The two brothers now made arrangements for the cremation of the dead body.[2] They gathered fuel, built up the funeral pyre, on which they placed the corpse, and with their own hands set fire to the wood, in all things acting as if the bird were a member of their own family. They repeated also those texts from the sacred Book which Brāhmins use for such an occasion.

[1] Rāma said that the fever of his grief was so great that it would dry up the ocean.

[2] Near Salem, Southern India, there are 'some chalk hills supposed by the natives to be formed of the bones of the mythical bird Jatāyus.' Monier Williams' *Modern India* quoted by J. C. Oman.

When the body had been burned, it was necessary to make the proper offerings to the spirits of the dead. First of all they hunted and slew several deer, whose flesh they spread upon the grass with the prayer that the departed spirit might obtain entrance into heaven. And thereafter they performed the water oblation with water taken from the Godāvari. When all was over, the heroes bathed in that sacred stream.[1]

The demon Kabandha

The brothers now resumed their journey towards the south. They had to travel through an almost impenetrable forest, shrouded in darkness and full of wild beasts. One of their experiences was an encounter with a great ugly female friend who made advances to Lakshmana. When she took him in her arms, Lakshmana could endure her conduct no longer and cut off her breasts, nose and ears. She took refuge in a cave as deep as hell. At a later stage a number of omens presaging disaster began to disturb the mind of Lakshmana and, very soon after, they found themselves faced with a most loathsome and immensely huge headless creature, all body and arms. The arms in particular were most alarming, being seven miles long. The fiend, for such he was, had a mouth in his belly and a single eye glittering on his breast. Into his misplaced mouth he could be seen casting lions and bears. It is added that he was able to handle a whole herd of deer at one time, choosing and rejecting them at his pleasure. When the giant seized them and held them up, one in each hand, both princes concluded that their last hour had come. For a little it is true that Rāma reproached his brother for losing heart. But he very soon began to philosophise on the power of Time, greater than destiny itself in carrying men away. It was Lakshmana who eventually called his brother to action and it was time he did so, as the giant was just about

1 Manu says that by pouring out water and offering food, a man worships the spirits of the departed. See *The Laws of Manu*, for the great importance attached to these rites, pp. 4, 6, 10, 11, 19, 31, 38, 41, 55.

to eat them up. Lakshmana was of the opinion that the giant's strength all lay in his arms and that if they hacked them off, he would be easily overthrown. This proved to be the case. The huge trunk-like creature fell to the ground exhausted with a roar that filled earth and heaven. But with his fall a great transformation took place. Turning his single eye on Lakshmana the fiend asked him to declare who they were and why they had come to that part of the world. When he learned that Rāma was before him, the fiend was overjoyed and asked the two exiles to listen to the wonderful story that he had to tell.

Kabandha's story

He had not always been a fiend. Once upon a time he had been famous for his beauty all over the three worlds. It was like the beauty of the Sun and Moon and of the god Indra. But being able to assume any shape he chose, he had got into the bad habit of going in the guise of an ugly demon and frightening the hermits who lived in a forest. Once he attacked a great ascetic, called Sthulashira, and as a result was cursed by that holy person to remain in the unsightly form he had then assumed. When he pleaded with the ascetic to forgive him and remove the curse, he was told as a concession, that he would return to his original form when Rāma came to the forest, cut off his arms and burned his body on a funeral pyre. Having told this story the fiend passed on to give another explanation of himself. He said his name was Danu to begin with, though now he was called Kabandha, which means a trunk. In his former guise he had, as a reward for his great asceticism, received from the god Brahmā the boon of long life. Unhappily in his conceit and pride he had quarrelled with and attacked the god Indra. That god so smote him with his thunderbolts that his head was thrust into his belly, and made him the ugly mis-shapen creature that he now was. He entreated the god to have mercy upon him and put him to death. But he was told that Brahmā had conferred on him the boon of long life, and that boon could not be annulled.

When he pointed out that maimed and shattered as he was (apparently he had lost the power of locomotion) he would starve for want of being able to go in search of food, Indra had made his arms seven miles long. With such arms he was able to lay hold of many wild beasts and deer. Indra added the same promise the ascetic had done, that Rāma would ultimately bring him relief. And every time he seized any sort of animal he seized it in the hope that Rāma was in his arms. In response to Rāma's request that he would tell him where Rāvana lived and where he had taken Sītā, the fiend replied that as a result of the ascetic's curse he had been robbed of his intelligence. But when Rāma had cremated his body and thereby restored him to his original form, he would be able to give him the name of one who knew Rāvana and who was capable also of rendering him great assistance.

Kabandha's cremation and transformation

As far as one can judge the heroes did not wait for their new friend's death. They carried him to a cave, collected a great mass of fuel and set it on fire. As the fire slowly did its work, Danu rose out of the ashes. He had shed for ever the ugly hideous shape which had afflicted him so long. Possessed of all his former beauty and adorned with garlands and jewels, he mounted high up into the air, seated in a lovely car drawn by swans. His body was so resplendent and full of light that the whole world was filled with its brightness and glory. As he had promised, Danu, to give him his original name, was able to communicate the name of the creature who he was certain would be able to give Rāma not only all the information he required, but to render him the most effective help. It was of Sugriva[1] he spoke, the king

1 The reader will remember (see Book i. c. 15, 16) that when the god Vishnu agreed to take birth in the four sons of Dasharatha, it was also resolved that the other gods as well as Gandharvas, Yakshas and other semi-divine beings should beget on female monkeys and bears and Apsarases a great multitude of sons, who would render the necessary assistance to Rāma in his conflict with Rāvana. Though the sons of different fathers, Sugriva and Bali are spoken of as brothers. Probably they were the sons of the same monkey mother. In view of the object for which Bāli was born, the divine plan was evidently disturbed by the hostility which broke out between them. And yet in Book iv. c. 9. we are told that Bāli was the older and Sugriva the younger son of the same father.

of the monkeys, the offspring of the sun, and like the sun able to see all that happened in the world. Sugriva had been driven from his kingdom by Bāli the son of Indra. He was now living in exile, on a hill called Rishyamūka near the lake Pampā, attended by four of his old lieutenants. Possessed of great strength and of a benevolent disposition, he was able to assume any shape he chose. Once his friendship was secured he would be able to send his followers in every direction. They would find out the place of Sītā's imprisonment, be it in heaven or hell, on the top of Mount Meru or in the prison house of Rāvana.

Danu gave a wonderful description of Pampā lake near which Sugriva had established his place of refuge. The lake abounded with water-fowl and was surrounded by fruit-trees of many kinds, and the most wonderful flowers. The flowers did not wither and the fruit never decayed. It was said that the fruit trees had a miraculous origin. The companions of the great ascetic Matanga,[1] whose hermitage it once had been, had often perspired very freely in their search for food. But such is the power of asceticism that when their sweat fell to the ground, fruit trees began to burst forth from this most unusual seed. The hermits had all passed away with the exception of one old lady, Savari. She lived however absolutely secure as the fear of Matanga's name prevented the wild beasts from entering the precincts of her hermitage. Danu had reason to believe that Savari was waiting for Rāma's coming. Once her eyes had looked upon his face, she would depart to the other world. Danu's hour of departure had also come. He had supplied the brothers with all the information they required, and so, wishing them success in their adventure, he disappeared from view. His last words were, 'Make friends with Sugriva.'

Kabandha ascends to heaven

[1] The story of Matanga is told in the *Mahābhārata*. Born a Chandāla he determined to procure the rank of Brāhmin by means of asceticism. The gods remonstrated with him over and over again. They told him that his desire was quite impossible of attainment. In the end, as he could not be made a Brāhmin, he was made a god. See *Mahābhārata*, p. 189.

Savari ascends to Heaven

Greatly encouraged by their interview with Danu the brothers continued their journey, and on the second day reached the shores of lake Pampā. There they met, as they had been promised, the ancient lady Savari, who with great reverence embraced their feet. When Rāma enquired as to the progress she had made in her ascetic practices, Savari replied that thanks to his coming, she had now gained the fruit of all her toil. She looked upon the prince as the greatest of all the celestials, and she knew that, having seen him, she would now be able to depart for the upper world. She had already received notice of his coming from the two ascetics who had set out for heaven immediately after they saw him at Chitrakuta.[1] In view of his expected arrival, Savari had collected a large variety of fruits for his entertainment. At Ramā's request the lady took them with her to inspect the famous hermitage of Matanga. They saw the altars which Matanga and his companions had erected. Though many years had passed since their departure, the flowers adorning these altars had never withered or decayed. In particular she called the brother's attention to the presence of the seven seas. When the aged ascetics, exhausted by their hard penances, were no longer capable of movement, the seven seas, in response to the thought of the holy men, had joined themselves into one and ministered to their needs.[2] Having shown them all that was to be seen Savari announced that she was anxious to depart and to rejoin her friends whom she had served so long. Accordingly, she entered into a fire and, before the gaze of Rāma and Lakshmana, ascended up into the sky adorned

[1] The reader will remember the story of Indra coming to take away the ascetic Sharabhanga to heaven, and of his refusal to go till he had seen Rama. The other ascetic was Sutikshna. Bk. iii. c. 5. 7. Though Rāma never speaks or thinks of himself as an incarnation of Vishnu, it is manifest that many of his contemporaries do.

[2] If these were the seven seas which surround the world, it was indeed a most remarkable feat. Griffith contents himself with speaking of seven lakes doing so, but in the translation edited by Mr. Dutt, the words are, 'the seven seas have appeared here in conjunction with their very thought.'

with glorious garments, ornaments and garlands, not of earth but of heaven.[1] The whole sky was lighted up with the splendour of her person. This glorious translation was the reward of her pious life and earnest contemplation. Rāma was greatly impressed by the wonderful spectacle, and he told his brother that he felt very uplifted. His dark forebodings had quite disappeared and he looked forward into the future with hope and confidence. It seemed as if their sorrows were at an end. But almost as he spoke deep darkness settled down upon his soul. Despite the beauty of the scenery through which they passed he could not forget his grief, and time and again declared that without Sītā he had no desire to live.

[1] When she entered the fire Savari was of course wearing the usual coarse ascetic garb, a coat of bark, the skin of a deer and matted hair.

BOOK IV

KISHKINDHA

Rama's search for Sugriva

The brothers were now standing by the shores of Lake Pampā, and Rāma spoke at great length on the beauty all round them. The season of spring had come and as he watched the birds and beasts happy with their mates, the passion of love with its consuming desires, ran strong in his breast.[1] The peacocks made him envious, he said; the winds whispered to him of the joys he had had with Sītā. If only she were with him in that lovely grove, he would have no wish to see his native land again, nor exchange his state with that of Indra. Lakshmana had great difficulty in persuading his brother to be calm. He should remember that he was 'high-souled and highly educated.' He should not only forget his grief, but forsake his 'amorous madness.'[2] If he would only rouse himself, all would be well. They would find Sītā, even if she had been hidden in the womb of Diti.[3] Thus spurred to action, Rāma set off at once in the direction of Rishyamuka,[4] in search of Sugriva. The mountain was not far away. When the monkey king saw them approaching, he was filled with the greatest alarm. He told his four faithful friends that the godlike creatures whom they saw advancing were emissaries of his brother Bāli. Dressed in the guise of hermits they were sent to beguile them to their doom. Sharing the anxiety of their leader the monkeys scampered off as

[1] The Kinnaras are also spoken of as sporting there. They were semi-divine creatures with human bodies and horses' heads.

[2] The words in inverted commas are quoted from Mr. Dutt's translation.

[3] Diti was the wife of Kashyapa, the mother of the demons. (see Note 4.)

[4] Of this mountain, Rishyamuka, it is said that if a man of good character falls asleep there and dreams of gold, he will find when he awakes that his dream is realized. But if a bad man tries to climb it, demons rush out and cast him headlong.

quickly as they could, jumping from one hill top to another and breaking down trees and branches in their flight. They communicated their fear to the wild beasts who joined in the stampede. When they stopped to take breath on the top of a lofty mountain, Hanumān,[1] Sugriva's chief lieutenant, urged his master not to be afraid. The hill they now stood upon was Malaya,[2] and to that hill the power of Bāli could not come. It was, he observed, a weakness of the monkey character, that it was lacking in stedfastness, was most unstable and liable to change. A monkey king, however, should not yield to this weakness, otherwise he was not fit to occupy the position he did. To these observations Sugriva replied that he could not help himself. The sight of two such mighty warriors, dressed like hermits, yet carrying swords, bows and arrows, was too much for him. He was sure his brother had sent them, and one had always to be on one's guard against the subtlety of kings. They used the hands of others when they wanted to kill you. And Bāli was very clever. But to relieve their minds he proposed that Hanumān should go and interview the two strangers, find out who they were and why they had come. He must not, however, be deceived by fair looks and fine words. Hanumān gladly agreed to this proposal and assuming the guise of a beggar soon found himself in the presence of Rāma and Lakshmana.

Hanuman's interview with Rama

The disguised mendicant asked the usual questions as to who they were and why they had come to that part of the country. He also expressed his admiration for their kingly appearance. They looked like gods, and not like men. He thought that they must be the Sun and Moon come down out of heaven to visit the earth. When the brothers continued looking and

[1] Hanumān was the son of Vāyu, the wind god, born to a monkey mother as part of the scheme to overthrow Rāvana (See Bk. i)

[2] Malaya was in the Western Ghats. The curse of Matanga protected it from the presence of Bāli and his followers.

listening, without offering any reply, Hanumān went on to tell who he himself was, the son of the Wind god, and who Sugriva was. He added, in conclusion, that he had come on behalf of his master to offer a friendly alliance. When Hanumān said this, Rāma, turning to his brother, expressed his satisfaction that what they had hoped for was about to be realized. He also extolled the grace and eloquence of Hanumān's language and declared his conviction that, with such an envoy, no king could fail to achieve his purposes. It was plain that their visitor must be thoroughly acquainted not only with the Rig, Yajur and Sāma Vedas, but with all the rules of grammar as well, to be able to use language so apt and graceful. He therefore bade his brother say how pleased they were to meet him and ask that they be at once escorted to Sugriva's presence. Lakshmana accordingly explained to Hanumān who they were, giving, as he did so, a brief summary of the reasons of their exile, and finally described how Sītā had been carried off by some demon whose name they did not know. They had been befriended by Kabandha (or Danu) and advised by him to solicit the assistance of Sugriva in discovering the demon's name and dwelling place.[1] The narrating of their sufferings and sorrows was too much for Lakshmana. He sighed and wept. But Hanumān comforted him with the assurance that all would be well. He might reckon that their task was accomplished already. The whole army of monkeys would be placed at the disposal of Rāma in the search for Sītā. With these words Hanumān reassumed his proper monkey shape and, placing the two brothers on his back, set off for the hill where Sugriva was impatiently awaiting the result of the interview.

1 It is strange that Lakshmana should say they did not know the demon's name. Jatāyus plainly told them that it was Rāvana. We shall also find in the following canto Hanumān telling Sugriva that Rāvana was the culprit.

When Hanumān had introduced the brothers with the usual summary of the hardships they had undergone, Sugriva expressed his deep gratitude that Rāma should be willing to befriend him, and asked that they might pledge their friendship by shaking hands. Rāma was greatly delighted with this proposal, but the clasping of hands was not enough to satisfy him and he took Sugriva to his breast in a warm embrace, saying, 'Thou art the friend of my heart. Our happiness and misery are common.' Hanumān further ratified the treaty by lighting a fire round which the two friends paced slowly and reverently, giving a solemn promise to right each other's wrongs. They were both equally confident of victory. Rāma, in particular, declared that before another sun had set he would slay Bāli and restore Sugriva to his throne. When this solemn pledge was made, the left eyes of Bāli and the demon hosts in far away Lankā began to throb, a presage to all of coming disaster. Sītā's left eye also began to throb, in her case a sign that happiness was near at hand.[1] The reader will remember that when Sīta was being carried through the air by Rāvana, she saw five monkeys standing on a hill top, and in the hope that somehow they would meet with Rāma, she dropped her mantle and several ornaments. Happily her hope was realized. The monkeys proved to be Sugriva and his four companions. And he proceeded to tell of the strange spectacle they had seen. A captive lady, carried through the air, calling aloud the names of Rāma and Lakshmana, and casting down her ornaments and upper garment to the ground. Rāma waited with the greatest impatience while Sugriva hastened to a cave and produced a mantle, ear-rings, bracelets and anklets. The sight of them was too much for Rāma.

Rama's league with Sugriva

Sugriva produces Sita's ornaments

[1] Mr. Griffith says in the case of a woman the significations of signs are reversed. He makes the further interesting note on this passage: '*With the Indians, as with the ancient Greeks, the throbbing of the right eye in a man is an auspicious sign.*'

Clutching them eagerly to his breast, he fell weeping to the ground, sighing 'again and again, like an enraged serpent in a hole.' Then handing them to his brother, he asked him to look at the ornaments which Sītā had worn. Lakshmana modestly replied that he had not seen either bracelets or ear-rings before; but he recognised the anklets. He had seen them often as he bowed before her honoured feet. It required considerable effort on the part of Sugriva to rouse Rāma from this fresh access of grief, which the sight of Sītā's mantle and ornaments had occasioned. However when the monkey king pointed out that it was not seemly to lose self-control so completely, Rāma wiped his eyes with the edge of a cloth and invited his friend to tell him the story of the wrongs he had suffered at the hands of Bāli. This Sugriva proceeded to do, prefacing his tale with the observation that the gods must be indeed well disposed towards him when he had acquired the help of such a powerful and virtuous friend.

Sugriva's story

According to the narrative which Sugriva proceeded to tell, he and Bāli were the younger and elder sons of the same father, the king of Kishkindhā. When their father died, Bāli succeeded to the throne, and the two brothers lived very happily together. One night when all had fallen asleep, they were awakened by a demon called Māyāvi, son of Dundubhi, thundering at the gates of their palace, and challenging Bāli to fight. Despite the pleadings of his wives and Sugriva, Bāli accepted the challenge. But whenever he saw the foe Māyāvi took to his heels and fled, pursued by Bāli, Sugriva following behind. After a long chase Mayāvi disappeared into a deep cave. Turning to Sugriva and bidding him keep a careful watch at the cave's mouth, Bāli quickly followed the fugitive, resolved to search its deepest recesses and to slay the demon. Sugriva waited and waited, day after day and month after month, and Bāli never returned. When a year had passed, to Sugriva's horror, a great stream of blood and pus came flowing,

like a river, out of the cave and with it the noise of tumult and shouting. Sugriva listened carefully but he could hear nothing like his brother's voice. Convinced that he must be slain and that it was his blood that he saw, Sugriva thought that the best thing he could do would be to imprison the demon in the cave. He accordingly rolled a great rock to the cave's mouth, and returned to Kishkindhā. When the nobles heard Sugriva's story, they placed him on the vacant throne. Some time passed and one day Bāli came home. Sugriva received his brother with open arms, but when he sought to express his joy, Bāli drove him from his presence and put all the ministers of his court to death. Refusing to believe the explanation that was offered Bāli dwelt on the long months of pursuit, and the successful issue, when he slew, not only Māyāvi, but all his followers. It was their blood that Sugriva had seen and their cries of dying agony that he had heard. It had given him many an anxious hour before he had succeeded in pulling down the great rock that barred the exit of the cavern. It was in this way, added Sugriva, that I was driven forth with nothing but a single cloth to cover my nakedness, and deprived of the society of my wife.

Bali's greatness

It was a great comfort to Sugriva, when he had told his story, to be told by Rāma that he would put Bāli to death and restore him to his former happiness. But as Rāma boasted of what he would do the mind of the monkey king was clouded by doubt, and he began to tell the prince of what mighty things Bāli had accomplished in the past. No doubt Rāma could burn up the three worlds as easily as the sun does at the dissolution of a universe. But he must not forget that Bāli could cross the ocean from east to west and from north to south before sunrise. He could tear up mountains from their base and toss them in the air as if they were hand-balls. There was, for instance, the record of what he did to Dundubhi,[1] an awful demon who was as big as

[1] This Dundubhi presumably was Māyāvi's father. See previous page.

a mountain, as strong as a thousand elephants, and a bull in shape. Once the great creature went and challenged the ocean to single combat. The ocean refused to accept the challenge and advised him to go and fight with Himavān, the lord of the Himālayas, the father of Umā, the wife of Shiva. But Himavān also begged to be excused, and suggested that he would find in Bāli a foeman worthy of his steel. Dundubhi accepted the suggestion and came thundering, as Māyāvi had done, to the gates of Kishkindhā. His bellowing made the very ground tremble. When Bāli appeared on the city walls accompanied by his wives to see what had happened, the gigantic bull told him he would give him one more night to enjoy himself in his zenāna. Next morning, however, at latest, he must come out and be killed. These statements made Bāli very angry. Laying down the gold chain he had received from his father Indra he descended from the walls, went out at the gate, and seized the bull by the horns. It was a big fight that followed. But in the end, after casting the bull to the ground several times and wounding him very severely, Bāli with a mighty effort, lifted the beast high in the air and tossed it at least seven miles off, where it fell dead. Most unfortunately as it passed through the air, some drops of blood from the bull's jaw, fell on the asylum of the great ascetic, Matanga. The saint was very angry when he saw the blood, and he cursed the person, whoever he might be, who had caused his dwelling place to be defiled. It is said that, in virtue of his ascetic merit, Matanga knew that Bāli was the offender, and the curse was to the effect that if he or any of his followers ever came within seven miles of his hermitage, they would be changed into stone. Whenever the monkeys in the neighbourhood heard the curse, they scampered off as quickly as they could. Bāli himself tried to soften Matanga's wrath, but the saint refused to listen. And that was the reason why, as we have seen, Sugriva was able to dwell in safety beside Matanga's former home. Bāli did not

dare to follow him knowing that, if he did so, he would be turned to stone. And to prove that what he said was true, the monkey king pointed out the skeleton of the dead bull, still lying on the ground, rising up like a mountain. Having told this wonderful story Sugriva turned to Rāma and asked if, after hearing this exploit of Bāli, he still thought he could prevail against him. Rāma did not reply but Lakshmana laughed and said, Would it not be a good idea to propose a test of Rāma's power? Ask him to do something and see if he can do it.

Rama's wonderful achievements

Sugriva, torn between fearful admiration for his brother's prowess and a desire to be polite and grateful to his new friend, responded by asking that Rāma should do two things that Bāli had done. Close at hand stood seven great Sāl trees which Bāli had been able to pierce with his arrrow. Would Rāma, just to comfort him, be so kind as to shoot an arrow through one of these trees, and secondly, would he throw the carcase of the dead buffalo Dundubhi, to a distance of two hundred bow lengths. If he was able to do these two things, then he was confident that Bāli was as good as slain. Rāma, smiling at his friend's embarrassment, gave the dead body a touch with his foot. The touch was enough to carry it through the air and drop it at a place seventy miles off.[1] Strange to say this demonstration of Rāma's super-human strength did not satisfy Sugriva. He pointed out that the dead body was now little more than skin and bone, and hardly any heavier than a bundle of hay. Bāli had done the feat when Dundubhi was newly dead. He was therefore constrained to ask that the second test be applied. In asking for it he was not in any way seeking to make light of Rāma's valour and glory. He was the first of men, even as the Sun was chief among the stars, the Himālayas among mountains and the lion among beasts. And sure enough, Sugriva had

[1] Mr. Dutt's translation has it that Rāma lifted the mighty carcase with his thumb and threw it the distance mentioned above.

good cause to be satisfied with the success of the second display. Rāma fitted an arrow to his bow. When it was discharged, it pierced, not just one tree, but the whole seven. And not only did it do that, but it pierced the mountain that stood behind the trees, and coming out at the other side, it travelled through the seven regions of the earth. When it had reached the lowest depths, it returned and placed itself in Rāma's quiver. This wonderful feat brought Sugriva to the ground in amazement and worship. Lying prostrate before the prince the monkey king declared that Bāli was nothing to him. The man who could pierce seven trees, a mountain and the earth itself with one arrow was more than a match for all the gods of heaven combined. He had not the least shadow of doubt or anxiety remaining. He was as pleased as if he had got Indra or Varuna to be his friend.

Sugriva runs away from Bali

Sugriva was now all impatience to see the combat with Bāli begun. He proposed that they should set off that instant for Kishkindhā, to which Rāma agreed. When they got close to the walls of the town, Rāma and Lakshmana concealed themselves in a wood, while Sugriva advanced to the gate and gave a great roar. Roused by the noise Bāli came out at once. When he saw his brother, he rushed at him with the greatest fury and a battle, in which their fists were the only weapons, ensued. Apparently it had been planned that when he got a good opportunity, Rāma should shoot Bāli with one of his arrows. But the two brothers were as like one another as the two Ashvins, and Rāma had to hold his hand. The result was that Sugriva, badly battered and bleeding profusely, had to take refuge in flight. He made for the shelter of Rishyamuka, a place to which Bāli could not follow him, because of Matanga's curse. When they saw their friend running away, Rāma and Lakshmana hastened after him. They found him very angry and also very much ashamed. Turning upon the prince he asked why he had rendered no assistance. Had he known he was

not going to kill Bāli, he would never have ventured near the walls of Kishkindhā. But Rāma very kindly and patiently explained how very helpless they had been, owing to the great likeness between the two brothers. To have fired in the hope of hitting Bāli was too great a risk. Causing the death of a friend, however unwittingly, was a very great sin, and the two combatants were not only absolutely alike in form and features but in deeds of valour, and strength of lung. They must devise some plan whereby it would be possible to distinguish between them. He therefore proposed that Lakshmana should make a garland of flowers and place it round Sugriva's neck. When the garland had been put on, the three returned to Kishkindhā town once more.

Bali is mortally wounded

On their way, they passed through some beautiful country. In particular, Rāma was impressed by a grove of fine trees, about which he made inquiry from Sugriva. The monkey king told him that in former days it had been the home of seven very eminent ascetics, whose austerities had made the spot so sacred that neither gods nor demons, neither beast nor bird had dared to invade its precincts. These seven holy men had practiced asceticisms which lasted for a period of seven hundred years. During that long time they had remained standing in water, and only broke their fast every seventh day. Sugriva advised his friends to pay homage to these distinguished saints, as such an act of worship was believed to cleanse the worshipper from all his sins. Rāma and Lakshmana were only too glad to do so, and continued their journey with greatly uplifted hearts. When they reached the walls of Kishkinhdā, Rāma and Lakshmana concealed themselves in the wood, as on their previous visit, while Sugriva advanced to the walls and uttered a mighty roar. He made such a terrific noise that birds and beasts were filled with terror. Bāli was naturally very angry at being roused from sleep a second time in one night. His face got as dark as the Sun does, when the demon

Rāhu swallows it in seasons of eclipse, while rage made his eyes and teeth blaze like a burning fire. His wife Tārā did her best to hold him back, and she had good reason for trying to do so, because she had heard from their son Angada that Sugriva had got wonderful champions to help him, and she was sure that he had not come alone. She thereupon began to relate the story of Rāma and Lakshmana, and of how the former had become famous as the succourer of the oppressed, and in particular of hermits who dwelt in the forest. Every one was acquainted with his deeds of valour, and of how he was endowed with both knowledge and virtue. She therefore advised her lord to make peace with Rāma and recognize Sugriva as his successor on the throne. If he did so, he would find that he had no better friend than his younger brother. If he was bent on battle, he would most certainly be destroyed. No one could resist a prince whose strength was equal to that of the god Indra; and whose anger was like the destroying fire which consumes all things at the dissolution of a universe. As she said this Tārā cast her arms about her husband's neck and wept aloud. Bāli refused to listen. He thanked her for her good advice. But he declared that such conduct as his brother had been guilty of was past endurance. He must go and punish him once more. It was better to die than to submit to such an insulting challenge. In the battle of fists and feet that again ensued, Sugriva got the worst of it, and soon began to lose a lot of blood. Happily for him, he had a helper near at hand. The garland of flowers, which Lakshmana had placed about his neck, made mistake impossible, and whenever Sugriva gave the signal, Rāma intervened. The arrow he fitted to his bow was like a serpent, and as it travelled through the air, it looked like the discus of Fate, discharged by the god of death to annihilate the worlds. The arrow smote Bāli on his breast and he fell, mortally wounded, to the ground.

But before he died Bāli was able, in a long address, to reproach the prince, and accuse him of conduct

unworthy of his caste and lineage. It was, he said, a breach of all the rules of battle, for a third party to intervene between two combatants. His wife had told him to beware of Rāma, but he refused to believe that a prince, so well spoken of, would be guilty of so base and cowardly an act. Dressed in the garb of an ascetic and making a profession of religion, why did he attack an innocent person who had never done him any harm, and in particular, attack him treacherously and behind his back. What was his reason for so doing? It could not be from love of wealth and power. There was no credit or profit to be acquired by killing a poor monkey that lived on roots and fruit. People belonging to his caste were not allowed to eat monkeys' flesh. Among five-toed animals, the porcupine, rhinoceros, hedgehog, iguana, hare and tortoise alone could be eaten. Even a monkey's skin and bones were forbidden to the twice-born, and reckoned among the things that should not be touched. [1] He wondered what excuse Rāma would offer, when people cross-examined him about his murder of a monkey. [2] He would be classed with those who killed cows and Brāhmins, with atheists and younger brothers who married before the older members of their family, [3] with traitors, thieves and destroyers of animals. Like a serpent that bites and kills a man when he is asleep, Rāma had taken a mean advantage of him, and keeping himself out of sight, had slain one whom it would have been very difficult to kill in open warfare. He had of course heard of what brought Rāma to that part of the country, and

Bali reproaches Rama

[1] See *Summary of the Laws of Manu*, ch. v. 'Rules regarding Lawful Food', p. 54. Mr Dutt omits the rhinoceros.

[2] Mr Griffith remarks on the inconsistency in the passages where the monkeys or Vānars are spoken of generally 'as semi-divine beings with preternatural powers, living in houses and eating and drinking like men; sometimes as here, as monkeys pure and simple, living in woods and eating fruits and roots.' Griffith's Translation, p. 345.

[3] It is still considered highly improper for a younger brother to marry before his elder brother. See Genesis, xxix. 26; and *Summary of Laws of Manu*; pp 15, 40. 108.

could have helped him also. If he had asked for his assistance, he would have given it gladly, and before the coming of another day he would have recovered Sītā. He would have found her even in the depths of hell, and brought Rāvana as a captive to his feet.

Rama's defence

When Bāli had spoken these 'modest, pious and auspicious words,' Rama informed him that he was speaking like a child, or rather with the fickleness that always characterizes the monkey tribe. He reminded him to begin with, that the whole earth belonged to the Ikshvāku race, and, that Bharata was its sovereign. And he Rāma was acting in his brother's name and by his authority, when he punished wrong-doers. He did not think that Bāli would venture to deny that he was a very conspciuous wrong-doer. Although king of the monkeys, he had forgotten the duties incumbent on a king, and yielded to unholy desire. Was it necessary to inform him that while a man should always revere his elder brother and teacher, as he reverenced his father, it was equally his duty to treat his younger brother as if he were his son. How then had he acted towards his younger brother, Sugriva? He had taken possession of his brother's wife, Rumā. And it was because he had been guilty of that great sin that he had been punished. The Sacred Books taught that it was right to kill the man who ravished his own daughter, his sister or his younger brother's wife. Rāma gave as another reason for his action the fact that he had promised to help Sugriva, and it was highly incumbent upon him to keep his word. Despite the fact that he had experienced great suffering and sorrow, he had never once told a lie in all his life. But for Bāli's comfort he would like to quote a couple of verses composed by Manu. They were useful for the 'purification of character,' and virtuous persons as well as himself prized them greatly. They were to the effect that when the guilty were punished for their sins and bore that punishment 'with

fortitude' they went to heaven, and received the same reward as the virtuous. When men confessed their sins, they obtained freedom therefrom, by means of either punishment or forgiveness. On the other hand, when kings failed to punish the guilty, the punishment they did not inflict fell upon themselves.[1] He would therefore advise Bāli to hold his peace. He richly deserved his punishment, and his reproaches were quite uncalled for.

But Rāma had another argument to prove that he had no cause to regret giving Bāli a mortal wound.

Bali only a monkey

Bāli was only a monkey. A great many people, including royal ascetics, were in the habit of eating flesh. In the pursuit of their prey they used nets and traps. They employed every kind of artifice and ambush. Nobody blamed them, and they never thought of blaming themselves when they engaged in hunting and killed deer and other animals. And so, in exactly the same way, said Rāma, I do not blame myself for killing you, whether you fought or not, because 'you are a monkey.' The prince added as a final word of warning that it was very wrong to criticize or find fault with kings, for they were gods in human form. Bāli was much impressed by these arguments presented by one who, he confessed, had acquired a 'mastery over the principles of religion,' and he asked the prince to forgive him for his foolish words. When he had further requested the prince to take care of Angada, his eldest son, and see to it that Sugriva did not ill-treat Tārā, his best loved queen, Bāli made a most surprising statement. It was to the effect that he had quarrelled with his brother in the hope that by making Rāma his enemy, he would secure the high honour of

[1] *Laws of Manu*, Book viii. *v.* 318 (Buhler's translation) reads as follows: 'Men who have committed crimes and have been punished by the king, go to heaven, being pure like those who performed meritorious deeds;' while *v.* 316. reads: 'But the king, if he punishes not, takes upon himself the guilt of the thief.'

dying by Rāma's hand.[1] In reply to this appeal, Rāma promised to take care of Angada, and repeated his previous observation, that as a result of receiving his appropriate punishment the monkey king would be 'released from his sins, and acquire a knowledge of religion.'

Tara's grief

When Tārā, the wife of Bāli, heard that her husband had been mortally wounded, she came hurrying from the town accompanied by her son, Angada and Bāli's other wives. She was so overwhelmed with grief that she declared that she would starve herself to death. She was sure her heart must be extraordinarily hard, when it did not break into an hundred pieces. And by a strange change of thought she pictured her husband breaking the hearts of the nymphs of heaven, when he passed within its portals. Hanumān, however, interposed and urged her to be calm. He pointed out that death was universal, and happiness or misery happened to all, as a result of their actions in a former birth. Living creatures had enough to do, in mourning for themselves. Bāli was dead, but while he lived he had fully performed all his kingly duties, been obedient to the teachings of morality, and was richly endowed with 'conciliation, charity and forgiveness.' He had now 'attained to the land of kings.' There was no reason, therefore, why she should mourn for him. Her business now was to see to it that Sugriva and Angada performed the ceremonies for the dead, in accordance with the teaching of the Sacred Books and, when that was accomplished, arrange for Angada's coronation. But Tārā replied that she would rather die with Bāli than be the mother of an hundred sons like Angada, while it was her opinion that Sugriva, and not Angada, should succeed to the throne.

[1] It is said quite a number of times that those who died at the hands of Rāma were greatly honoured. But Mr. Griffith expresses his surprise that Vālmīki should put such an excuse into Rāma's mouth, as that Bāli was only a monkey. Bāli's brother, Sugriva, was 'a dear friend and almost an equal,' and now he winds up his reasons for killing Bāli by coolly saying, 'Besides you are only a monkey, you know, after all, and, as such, I have every right to kill you how, when and where I like.' Griffith's Translation, p. 347.

The poem sometimes speaks of Bāli, as if he were already dead, and sometimes as if he were yet alive. That he was still living is proved by the fact that Bāli speaks once more before he breathes his last. This time his words are addressed to Sugriva, whom he definitely recognizes as his heir. He expressed regret for the enmity which had divided them so long, but Fate was as usual made to bear the blame. It was not the will of Destiny that they should enjoy together the 'double bliss' of brotherly love and kingly authority. He requested him, however, to show a kindly interest in Angada, and, in particular, advised him to take frequent counsel with Tārā. He had found that her advice was extremely valuable. She had a wonderfully subtle mind, and the dying king urged his brother to perform, without hesitation, what the chaste lady instructed him to do. Just before he expired Bāli gave to Sugriva a celestial garland, in which he said Shrī, the goddess of good fortune, herself dwelt. When Tārā saw her husband die, she once more cast herself upon the ground, while the princes of the monkey race began to extol the mighty exploits of the dead hero. In particular they spoke of a battle which he had waged for fifteen long years with a Gandharva, called Golabh. Neither of the combatants had paused for a moment all that time. They naturally asked with wonder how it had been possible for Rāma to bring about his death so quickly. The sight of his brother's dead body caused a wonderful revulsion of feeling in the mind of Sugriva. Forgetting all that he had said against him in the past, he now declared that Bāli had always been actuated by the most fraternal feelings, and for himself, that he had been guilty of a very great sin in compassing his death, a sin for which he had already earned the condemnation of everybody 'in this world.' Far better for him if he had never left Rishyamuka. Better to earn the most precarious livelihood in the forest than to gain entrance to heaven stained with his brother's blood. In fact, Sugriva was

Bali dies

so overwhelmed with remorse and sorrow that he asked Rāma's permission to cast himself upon the funeral pyre. He assured the prince that Angada and the other monkeys would, in obedience to his commands, prosecute the search for Sītā. To this appeal Tārā added another of her own. It was to the effect that Rāma would kill her also. She said that he would be guilty of no sin in doing so, because she was indeed her dead husband's soul, the soul of one who had been already slain. The Vedas and other sacred books taught that wives were 'inseparably blended with their husbands, and she was sure that Bāli would find no pleasure in association with the nymphs of heaven. Even in the regions of the celestials, she knew that her lord would never be happy, so long as he was separated from her. 'The wise say that there is no gift better than that of a wife.'[1] To these appeals Rāma replied by saying that men are in bondage to the acts they did in a previous life, and that no one can resist the course and ways of Time. Virtue, pleasure and profit were all subject to Time. They had paid the tribute of affection by the profuseness of their tears; but tears did nothing to benefit the dead. One duty remained, and the sooner it was performed the better. And that was to make preparations for cremating the dead body. These words roused the bystanders to action. 'Clothes, garlands, scents, oil, clarified butter, and other necessary articles,' were got ready at once, while some of the company entered a neighbouring cave, from which they produced a handsome bier on which the body of the dead monkey was placed. It is said that the bier was like a war chariot in shape, with a throne erected in the midst. On each side of it were painted figures of soldiers, with birds and trees as well. It had latticed windows, too, adorned with beautiful carving and encrusted with precious stones. It was indeed a vehicle worthy of the gods. A long procession of mourners proceeded and followed the corpse to the

[1] Quoted from Dutt's translation, p. 759.

burning ghāt. Tārā and a large number of other female monkeys gave loud expression to their sorrow. When the fire had been applied to the pyre, Angada made the circuit of the dead body and, with the leaders of the monkey race, duly performed the water oblation. In all these ceremonies, Rāma took a sympathetic part. It is said that his eyes were full of tears as he witnessed the grief of the mourners.

Sugriva's coronation

But the thoughts of every one were quickly turned to the future, and Hanumān proposed that Sugriva should be installed on the throne of Kishkindhā without further delay. When Rāma was invited to grace the ceremony with his presence, he reminded his friends that the terms of his exile made it impossible for him to enter either a town or village, before the expiry of fourteen years. But he shared the view that Sugriva's coronation should take place at once, and that Angada should be recognized as heir-apparent. He added that as the rainy season had now begun, it was hopeless to expect that they should prosecute their search for Sītā, or make their attack on Rāvana, until the coming of winter. He would spend the intervening four months in a spacious cave near by. It was plentifully supplied with water, containing, as it did, a lovely lake adorned with lotuses and lilies. Thus encouraged, the monkeys hastened to their capital, where its new ruler was received by the inhabitants with every sign of reverence. The coronation of Sugriva was performed in accordance with the rites set forth in the Sacred Books. Texts from Scripture were duly recited by those competent to do so. Sacred grass, clarified butter, a tiger skin, water brought from sacred streams and which had been kept in jars of gold, sandal wood, jewels and gold are all spoken of as having been employed. The king was seated on a golden throne facing the east. Above his head was held the white umbrella, and those other insignia of royalty were not absent, 'the chowries, with their waving hair, in golden handles, wondrous fair.' The whole scene

made the onlooker think of the gods, enthroning Indra, king of heaven.

Rama grows impatient

As we have seen Rāma and Lakshmana lived in a cave during the rainy season. But they both found it exceedingly difficult to spend so long a time doing nothing. Rāma declared that the four months passed as slowly as a hundred years. And when these four months of waiting were over, when the sun shone once more in a clear sky, another cause for anxiety emerged. Sugriva had forgotten his promises, he had even forgotten his duties as king. Leaving the administration of affairs to others, he was spending his nights and days in idle sloth, in the society of his queen and other females, particularly that of Tārā, his dead brother's wife. Rāma, stung to the heart by such base ingratitude, sent Lakshmana to warn Sugriva that if he did not keep his plighted word, not only he, but all his kindred would share the fate of Bāli. Lakshmana was wrought to such a pitch of anger by seeing his brother's indignation and grief that Rāma had to urge him to subdue his wrath. His brother's counsel cannot have had much effect, for we are told that Lakshmana, on his way to Kishkindhā, uprooted trees and tore down mountains with his hands, while he broke rocks to pieces with his feet. The monkeys of the neighbourhood and of the town itself fled before him panicstricken, filling the air with their chatter. It is said that some of these animals had the strength of a thousand elephants. At the city gate Lakshmana met Angada and bade him tell his uncle that Rāma's brother had come. But when the prince entered Sugriva's presence, accompanied by Hanumān, he found that the king had fallen into a drunken sleep, from which he was with great difficulty aroused. And when he was finally wakened, the monkey king showed no signs of remorse. And in justice to him it should be stated that, before Lakshmana's arrival, he had already summoned his subjects to present themselves at Kishkindhā within the space of fourteen days, in order that the search for

Sītā might be systematically and thoroughly arranged. This fact, however, did not prevent Hanumān from administering a sharp rebuke to the love-besotted monarch, and warning him of the dangers he would incur if he did not render the most hearty and energetic assistance to the Prince of Ayodhyā, by whose help and prowess he now enjoyed the kingdom of his fathers. Rāma could destroy gods and demons. The hero's wrath must be quickly assuaged, and his first business was to receive Lakshmana with the utmost reverence, and promise that the search for Sītā would be begun without another moment's delay.

Lakshmana reproaches Sugriva

A wonderful description is given of the city of Kishkindhā, as Lakshmana entered it. Its trees yielded fruit all the year round, whatever any one desired. The air was full of the fragrance of sweet smelling flowers. It was adorned with noble buildings, these being no less than twenty-two gorgeous palaces for that number of monkey chiefs whose names are given. The palace of Sugriva himself surpassed all the others in beauty. Its gardens were full of celestial fruit and flowers that had the colour of molten gold. As he passed through the seven courts which led to the audience hall, Lakshmana found himself surrounded by many handsome maidens. The noise made by their tinkling ornaments filled the prince with a strong feeling of modesty, and he retreated into a corner ashamed to think that he had entered the women's apartments of the palace. He was so abashed that he stretched his bow, and the sound it made could be heard in every part of the town. Sugriva was greatly alarmed and he appealed to Tārā, Bāli's widow, to go and pacify the angry prince; men of Lakshmana's disposition and character were never rude to women. When Tārā had mollified him, he would venture to receive him. Tārā herself was under the influence of liquor, which made her bold, and she approached Lakshmana with the request that he would tell her why he was so angry, and in what way Sugriva

had happened to offend him. Lakshmana answered that the monkey king was losing both piety and wealth by indulging in sensual pleasures. No one could hope to prosper who made use of strong drink. To this Tārā answered that she knew how far astray Sugriva had wandered from the paths of virtue. But the irresistible power of love, as personified in the god Kāma, had taken him captive, and Lakshmana should remember that even great saints like Vishvāmitra had fallen victims. For no less a period than ten thousand years that holy man had sported with Menakā, the heavenly nymph, and never realized that the days were passing. And then, quickly changing her ground, she said it was Rāma's duty to forgive his friend, and Lakshmana's duty to rise superior to the power of wrath. These words seem to have made an impression on Lakshmana. At any rate his mood changed sufficiently for Tārā to think that she might now escort him to Sugriva's presence. As she led him through the inner apartments, the lady observed that no disgrace attached to a man of good will, even if he happened to see the faces of other men's wives. The prince found Sugriva surrounded by the women of his zenana. The poet says they looked like stars, shining in the sky, when the full moon has risen. He stood with suppliant hands, joined together, as Lakshmana reproached him with ingratitude. The prince quoted, in particular, an utterance of the god Brahmā, to the effect that the man who told a lie about a horse was guilty of the sin of killing an hundred horses, that he who told a lie about a cow was guilty of the sin of killing a thousand cows, but that the man who told a lie about another man was deserving of death with all his kindred. There was hope of forgiveness for the thief, the drunkard, the killer of cows and the breaker of vows; but there was none for the ungrateful. He ended by saying that if Sugriva did not keep his word and set out at once in search of Sītā, he would be quickly despatched to the land of death to join his brother. To this threat Sugriva made

a very meek reply. He was Rāma's humble servant, ready to help him at any moment he chose to summon him. But he added that he did not see in what way he could be of assistance to one who by his own unaided strength could destroy Rāvana and all his hosts. Tārā, on the other hand, while asserting that Sugriva was willing to surrender everything he possessed in helping his friend and benefactor, declared that Rāma could not hope to conquer and slay Rāvana's countless hosts of Rākshasas without assistance. Rāvana was 'a wily warrior,' and hence the 'special need of Sugriva.' She ended by stating that Sugriva had already sent out messengers to summon his followers to Kishkindhā, and before another sun had set, he would see millions and millions of millions of monkeys gathered round the city walls. Lakshmana was so delighted with this assurance that he apologized to Sugriva for his harsh words, and told the monkey that he was like Rāma himself in strength and courage; both chosen by the gods to help one another in overthrowing the power of Rāvana, the demon king.

Sugriva appeases Rama

Their differences thus happily settled, it was natural that Sugriva should wish to see Rāma and prove that he was fully prepared to keep the promise he had made. The monkey king accordingly called for his chariot and accompanied by Lakshmana, set out for the cave in which Rāma dwelt. It is worth noting that the car was made of gold. The white umbrella was held over Sugriva's head, attendants stood behind, waving chowries; trumpets and conch shells were blown, while bards sang their royal master's praise. When Rāma and Sugriva met, the prince of Ayodhyā took the monkey king in his arms and lovingly embraced him. He did not fail however to observe that too great devotion to pleasure was most injurious to kings and that the wise man always sought to give due place to virtue and profit, the two other members of the triad,

to which the poem so often refers.[1] But all thought of reproof disappeared from Rāma's mind when Sugriva dwelt on the millions of helpers who had already arrived, and spoke of millions of millions who were on the way,[2] as big as hills and as strong as the god Indra. No wonder Rāma took Sugriva in his arms a second time and expressed the opinion that they might reckon Rāvana as already slain.

Sugriva collects his armies

And even as he spoke the whole earth began to shake and the sun was darkened. Sugriva's mighty hosts of bears and monkeys had already arrived and the air was filled with dust. If the monkey king had been remiss before, he was filled with amazing energy now. The monkeys and bears were divided into four separate armies, for the north, south, east and west, respectively. They were sent out under well chosen leaders and bidden to search every mountain and valley, to travel to the extreme limits of the universe, to the borders of the land of death, to the very places where the sun rises and sets, and the utmost confines of the frozen north. The names of rivers, mountains and countries which these four armies were to explore are given with great detail. The rivers include the Ganges, here called Bhagirathi, the Sarju, near Rāma's native town, the Kālindi, the Jumna, the Indus, the Saraswati, the Sone, the Mahi, the Kāvari, the Narmadā and the Godāvari. The mountains spoken of, apart from the Vindhya hills and the Himālayas, were the more or less mythical peaks of Kailāsa, Meru, Mandara and

[1] The reader will have noticed this frequent reference. The *Mahābhārata* and the *Laws of Manu* also frequently speak of them together: virtue or religion, wealth or profit, pleasure or desire. They are even symbolized in the strange story of Brahmā acting as Shiva's charioteer. *Summary of Mahābhārata*, pp. 231–32.

[2] Sugriva begins by speaking of kotis of monkeys. A koti is equal to 10 millions. But not content with that, he says that *arbudas* and *shankus* of monkeys will come; that is 100 millions and 10 millions of millions; he even surpasses that and says, *antyas* or a 1000 millions of millions, and *parārdhas* or 100,000 millions of millions of monkeys will assist in the search for Sītā. And these Parārdhas of monkeys are like hills in size and in strength resembling the great god Indra! See Dutt's translation, p. 804.

others, on which gods, Gandharvas and other semi-divine beings rejoiced to spend their days. The god of wealth, for instance, lived in a beautiful palace, which the divine architect Vishvakarmā, had built for him on mount Kailāsa. It was made of burnished gold. It had close to it a great lake 'overflowing with lotuses and lilies, thronged with swans . . . and frequented by troops of Apsarases.' The list of countries and peoples is specially interesting. It includes the people of Videha or Mithilā, the home of Sītā; the Mālavas or people of Mālwa; the Kashikoshalas, or people of Kāshi (Benares) and Koshala, the Pundras (in Western Bengal) the Angas (also in a part of Bengal); the Vidarbhas (Berār and Kandesh) the Mahishikas (Mysore) the Matsyas (probably in northern Rajputana) the Kalingas, and Cholas (on the Coromandel coast), the Andhras (in Southern India), the Keralas (inhabitants of Malabar), the Pāndyas (in the Deccan), the Pulindas (a name of barbarous tribes), the Surasenas (the inhabitants of Mathurā), the Yāvanas (Greeks), the Shakas (Scythians), the Melechhas, out castes and foreigners, with the Kāmbojas, the Prasthatas, Bharatas and Madrakas, all reckoned as tribes to the north-west of Hindustān.[1] These countries are merely mentioned by name and nothing more, but the poet enters into a long description of a most mysterious country to the north, beyond the Himālayas. It is called Uttara Kuru, or the northern Kurus. It is there that those who have acquired religious merit, dwell. The whole country is full of gold and precious stones. Its trees yield new fruits and flowers every day; and not only that but there are trees which produce clothes, ornaments, jewels and wonderful perfumes. Indeed whatever the heart desires can be obtained from these trees. Even beds 'with costly jewels and variegated covers,' and

[1] The town of Avanti or Ujjain, is also mentioned. Men-eating tribes as well as people with only one leg, who were very swift of foot, are also spoken of. There is a large number of names which cannot be identified, and which consequently are not quoted.

garlands and food and drink, can be got for the asking. There is no sadness and no sorrow there. The noise of music and laughter fills the air night and day. There are beautiful females, too, 'adorned with every accomplishment.' The righteous who have acquired religious merit, as also Gandharvas and Siddhas, Nāgas and other semi-divine beings associate with these women. Still further to the north there lies another country which enjoys the light of neither sun or moon. But it shines resplendent, nevertheless, in the brightness that is cast upon it by a great golden mountain called Somagiri. That country is the home of the god Brahmā, the soul of the universe, the adorable Sambhu, fraught with the spirits of the eleven Rudras.[1] When you see that mountain, said Sugriva, you must turn back at once. Even the gods are unable to enter that land. There is no way into it for any creature.

The army of the South

Those who were to travel eastward in their search were told to continue their journey until they saw the thousand-headed snake, Shesha, or Ananta, the infinite, who upholds the world and is worshipped by all the gods. Not far from there they would see a great mountain famous from the fact that it was on it Vishnu first planted his foot when he traversed the universe in three paces, and circumvented the demon Bali in his dwarf incarnation. Before accomplishing their mission it would appear that this particular army of monkeys would have to cross not only the *Sea of Milk*, but other seas and oceans as well. The army of the south was placed under the leadership of Hanumān. He was told to approach, with the greatest care, the island of Lankā, because it owned the sway of Rāvana. They were to travel far beyond it, over a most mysterious

[1] I have quoted this passage in detail because the name Sambhu is one of the titles of the god Shiva. The reader is aware that the name of Rudra also was employed for that deity. The eleven Rudras, with the Ashvins, the eight Vasus, and twelve Adityas, comprised the *Thirty-Three Gods* so often referred to, in this poem. See Note 3. It is interesting to find these names ascribed to Brahmā.

ocean and past great islands floating in the deep; in particular a great mountain called Kunjara where Vishvakarmā had built a dwelling place for the saint Agastya. It was a palace made entirely of gold, seven miles long and seventy miles high. Vāsuki, the king of snakes, with a great many of his race, also dwelt on that island. Beyond this island they were not to proceed because by that time they would be near the mansions of the departed and the 'metropolis of Yama,' the god of death, a place shrouded in eternal gloom. Realizing that Hanumān was the most trusted of all Sugriva's followers, Rāma gave to that distinguished warrior a ring on which his own name was engraved. Should he be so fortunate as to find Sītā, he was to give it to her as a pledge that he was indeed the messenger and representative of her husband. Strict injunctions were laid upon all the monkeys to be back within thirty days. The penalty of death would be exacted from every one that failed to return within that time. Promising to accomplish their king's behests, they all set off at once. Each of the leaders boasted that he alone would slay Rāvana. As to getting back within a month, none of them appeared to be anxious, because they could cover seven miles and even seven hundred miles at a single bound. But, as Sugriva said, they were the offspring of gods and Gandharvas and could assume any shape and form they chose. They were as large as mountains and as fierce as Daityas and Dānavas.[1]

The Southern army befriended by Sampati

By the end of the allotted time, the armies which had gone to the north, east and west returned to Kishkindhā with the announcement that they had seen and heard nothing of either Sītā or Rāma. They expressed their conviction, however, that Hanumān and the army of the south would be successful, as it was in that direction Rāvana

[1] Rāma was much impressed with Sugriva's wide knowledge of foreign countries and asked him how he had acquired it. Sugriva explained that when he was sent into banishment by Bāli, he had roamed over the whole earth.

had been seen travelling with his unwilling captive. But it seemed as if the southern army, also, would meet with failure. For one thing, they lost their way in a great subterranean cavern from which they would never have been able to emerge without miraculous help. But they were fortunate enough to meet with a female ascetic, who had made that cave her home.[1] This kind-hearted lady told them to shut their eyes. When they had obeyed her they found themselves transported, in a moment, to the upper air and standing by the shores of the southern sea. By the time they had escaped from this cavern, the thirty days had more than expired. Angada, Sugriva's nephew, who was associated with Hanumān in command of the southern army, lost heart so completely that he proposed they should starve themselves to death. It was better to die, he said, in this manner, than to perish at the hands of Sugriva. Hanumān did his best to persuade his followers from acting so foolishly. But it was no use and they all sat down upon a hill overlooking the sea. That the act might have its due religious significance, they sipped water and sat facing the east on sacred grass whose points were turned to the south. Fortunately their thoughts soon took another direction, because a great vulture, called Sampāti, and, as they afterwards learned, the older brother of Jatāyus, who tried to rescue Sītā, appeared on the scene. The bird was greatly delighted at seeing such a mighty host of monkeys, and told himself that he would eat them all up one by one. The monkeys had their own thoughts when they saw the bird. Angada, in particular, was seized with strong feelings of remorse, to which he gave expression, telling his friends that the bird had come to destroy them for so easily abandoning the quest for Sītā. And he called upon his friends to emulate the example of Jatāyus, that other vulture, who had gladly given his life in trying to save Sītā's life. This was a most lucky illustration. Sampāti

[1] This cavern was built by Maya, the architect of the Dānavas or demons Maya obtained his architectural gifts from the god Brahmā, as a reward for 1000 years asceticism. So the lady said.

had never heard of his brother's death, and he at once drew near and asked Angada to tell him how and where his brother had died. When Sampāti had heard the touching tale of his brother's noble end, he was able to connect it with an incident which he himself had witnessed. One day he had seen a demon carrying a lovely lady through the air, and heard her cry, 'Help, Rāma, help, Lakshmana.' The lady, he said, was manifestly Sītā, and her cruel ravager was Rāvana. It was here that Sampāti gave information of the greatest value. He knew all about Lankā. It was an island, seven hundred miles distant from the spot where they were sitting. And, most remarkable fact, he was able standing where he was to see not only this island but both Rāvana and Sītā. The lady was shut up, a close prisoner, in an inner apartment of Rāvana's golden palace, closely guarded by female Rākshasas. This wonderful visual power he attributed to what he called *sauparna* or clairvoyance,[1] but he added that it was also due to the fact that vultures fed on certain kinds of flesh which had been ordained for them. At any rate, the result was that Sampāti could see across to Lānka, seven hundred miles distant, and not only Lānka, but Rāvana and Sītā as well. He therefore urged them all not to delay a single moment and make immediate plans for crossing the intervening ocean.[2]

[1] Dutt's translation, p. 851, so expresses it.

[2] Sampāti had lost the power of flight, owing, to the fact that, in his battle with the demon Vritra, his wings had been scorched by flying too near the sun. He therefore asked the monkeys to carry him to the edge of the sea, that he might make the water-oblation in honour of his deceased brother, Jatāyus.

BOOK V

THE BEAUTIFUL

Hanuman leaps across the straits

The monkeys had now to face the question as to how they were to cross the seven hundred miles of ocean that lay between them and Ceylon. They spoke of yojanas, and a yojana is seven miles. Some of them said they could jump ten, others twenty or thirty yojanas, at a single bound, but none ventured to think that they could do more than ninety yojanas, which was ten less than the distance before them. Angada, the son of Sugriva, who was one of the southern army, said he was prepared to make the attempt. But Jāmbavān, king of the bears, said that he would not be allowed. It was the practice of kings to send their soldiers and followers to fight and act in their place, but never to go forth themselves. For himself Jāmbavān said that in his younger days he could have made the jump quite easily, but he was getting old and stiff, although he thought he might manage ninety yojanas with an effort even now. Throughout all this discussion Hanumān had remained silent.

Jāmbavān, however, now turned and asked him why he said nothing, and probably with a view to rousing his resolution, the aged bear told his companions what a wonderful creature Hanumān was. Born in a subterranean cavern, the son of Vāyu and an Apsarasa condemned to wear the monkey form, Hanumān, soon after birth, had jumped right out of the earth and up into the sky to a distance of over two thousand miles. And he was sure that if Hanumān would only put forth his strength, he would acquire high renown, and men would liken him to Vishnu, who had circled

1 Jāmbavān said of himself that he had gone right round the earth twenty-one times.

the universe in three steps.[1] These compliments moved Hanumān greatly, and he began to swell to a tremendous size. Nor was boasting excluded. He said he could go round Mount Meru a thousand times and stir the depths of ocean with his hands. He could travel more quickly than the sun, and even reach the stars. As he boasted thus, Hanumān made a tremendous jump which caused the mountain on which he stood, to reel to its foundations, and said that he would jump the straits. Before setting out he joined his hands in prayer to the Sun, Indra, Vāyu, Svayambu [2] and other divine beings in order that they might bless his undertaking. It is said that the gods and other inhabitants of heaven followed his course with the greatest interest, raining down flowers in token of their approval. The ocean showed particular interest, for he persuaded a mountain called Mainaka, which was submerged beneath his waters, to raise its head above the surface, that Hanuman might rest upon it, even for a moment. But when the mountain did as it was requested and invited Hanumān, in a speech of great length, to pause even for a little, the monkey, with a smile, said that it was quite impossible and hurried on. Indra was greatly pleased with the mountain for offering hospitality to Hanumān, and thanked it for its thoughtful kindness. The mountain was overwhelmed with pleasure at this compliment from so high a source, and sank its grateful head once more beneath the waves.

Adventures by the way

But for some reason, which is not explained, the celestials were anxious to block the progress of the monkey, at least for a time, and they called upon Surasā, the mother of serpents, to intercept him. It is said that Surasā had obtained a boon from Brahmā, that any one who ventured to pass her must be swallowed

[1] Here is another reference to Vishnu's incarnation as a dwarf.

[2] Svayambhu, the Self-existent, is sometimes applied to the Supreme Spirit, Brahma, and sometimes to Brahmā, the creator-god. The reader of the *Laws of Manu* will, I think, find it applied to both. In his translation Mr. Griffith writes of Brahmā.

by her. She accordingly got right in front of Hanumān and told him it was impossible for him to escape. The promise of the god could not be evaded or ignored. Hanumān tried to explain the urgency of his errand to the serpent, but when he saw it was of no avail, he got very angry, and told the serpent to open her mouth wide and swallow him. She opened it very wide, seventy miles wide. But Hanumān stretched himself to an equal size, and swallowing was impossible; and so the serpent opened her mouth twice as wide as before, making it one hundred and forty miles wide. But again Hanumān made himself equally big. The competition went on in this manner until Surasā had enlarged her mouth so that it measured seven hundred miles. And lo! 'in a moment, Hanumān contracted himself to the size of an ordinary thumb, and jumping in at one side of Surasā's mouth, sprang out at the other. He then turned to the serpent and, with much respect, told her that the boon of Brahmā had been indeed observed. Not to be outdone in the paying of compliments, Surasā expressed the hope that Hanumān would be successful in his search for Sītā. Hanumān had one more adventure to experience before he landed in Ceylon. And this time it was with a female Rākshasa, who, like Surasā the sea serpent, had obtained one of Brahmā's most inconvenient boons. The name of this Rākshasa was Sinhikā, a creature of great age and able to assume any shape she chose. The boon she had obtained from Brahmā was to the effect that she could capture her prey, by laying hold of the victim's shadow. Seeing Hanumān advancing, Sinhikā was greatly delighted, for she had not been able to secure food for many days. Clutching at his shadow she began to draw Hanumān nearer and nearer to herself. Hanumān could not understand what had happened. As he said, he felt like a great ship suddenly arrested in its course by an adverse wind. [1] But when he looked downwards towards the sea, he saw the

[1] It is interesting to note that in this one canto we have two references to ships. The other is to the effect that Hanumān pursued his journey like a ship flying before the wind.

explanation. Sugriva had warned him beforehand of the demon's wondrous power. As he had done with the serpent, so now again, Hanumān enlarged his body to a tremendous size. The demon followed his example, and rushed at him with wide opened jaws. Hanumān, with the quickness of light, contracted himself greatly and rushed down her throat, disappearing from view, as the moon does when Rāhu swallows him in seasons of eclipse.[1] But once inside her belly the monkey began to tear at the walls of that great cavern, and with so much success that he not only cut a way out for himself, but he deprived the horrid creature of her life. The celestials who had been following the monkey, seated in their aeroplanes, were greatly delighted with the success of Hanumān. They not only congratulated him thereon, but expressed their hope that good fortune might continue to attend all his efforts.

Hanuman in Lanka

Very soon after Hanumān landed on the shores of Lankā. But when he saw the strength of its capital, and the multitude of its defenders, he felt somewhat depressed, and he asked himself, what Rāma could do, even if he succeeded in crossing the ocean. And, as for his fellow monkeys, he did not believe that there were more than three of them capable of making the leap. But his first business was to get access to the town and particularly to the palace where Sītā was confined. At first he thought of assuming the shape of a Rākshasa. But when he remembered the wonderful faculty these demons possessed of discovering secrets—as he put it—'even the wind does not stray here unperceived,' he decided to keep his own natural form. But he contracted himself to the size of a cat, and sprang lightly upon the walls of Lankā. It was evening when he entered the town. The poem gives a graphic description of that wonderful place. It was crowded with lofty

1 The eclipse of the Sun and Moon are believed to be due to the fact that the demon Rāhu periodically swallows or tries to swallow them. There are frequent references to this belief in the *Rāmāyana*. For the origin of the story see *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 27.

houses of seven and eight stories. The houses were adorned with crystal and gold. Its gateways and lattices were of gold. Its pavements were studded with pearls and other precious stones. As he wandered through the town, gazing at its beauty, Hanumān was met by the guardian goddess of the city.[1] The goddess naturally asked Hanumān by whose permission he had ventured to enter the capital of Rāvana, and ordered him to depart at once. Indeed she added that she would kill him there and then. But Hanumān answered that he had come to see the town, and would not depart till he had feasted his eyes on all its beauties. This reply made the goddess very angry, and she gave Hanumān a slap on the face. Although he did not like to strike a female, the monkey was quite unable to control himself, and doubling his fist, he smote the goddess so severely that she fell prostrate on the ground. Begging for mercy she told the monkey of a prophecy which had been uttered by the god Brahmā himself[2] many years before. It was to the effect that when a monkey would overcome the goddess of Lankā, the reign of the demons would be imperilled. She felt convinced that the prophecy had been fulfilled. Rāvana and all his hosts were doomed. And the capture of Sītā had been the immediate cause. The goddess, therefore, not only offered no further resistance, but invited Hanumān to go where he pleased and expressed the hope that he would ere long be successful in his search.

Hanuman searches in vain for Sita

Hanumān thus encouraged pursued his way through the city. He could hear, on every hand, the sound of music and laughter, women singing and dancing to the tinkling of their anklets and zones. Minstrels also were heard, chanting the praises of Rāvana, and priests repeating sacred texts and prayers. On the

[1] 'The city's guardian goddess' is the free translation used by Mr. Griffith. In Mr. Dutt's translation we read that 'the wind god's son was met by the city in her native shape.'

[2] The name here given to Brahmā is once more Svayambhu, the self-created, or self-existent.

street itself he met 'innumerable spies,' whose business it was to protect their ruler from all harm. These persons were disguised as ascetics. Some were wearing either cow-hide or garments made of cloth, others were wearing no clothes at all. Some were close shaven, others had matted hair. There were also, of course, large numbers of soldiers and watchmen armed with a great variety of weapons, in strange contrast to the ascetics whose only protection was in the sacred grass and holy fire which they carried in their hands. The palace itself, towards which Hanumān naturally directed his steps, stood on the top of a hill, surrounded by a great wall and guarded by a deep moat. It is quite impossible for any one to attempt to describe the beauty of the palace. As the tiny monkey, unhindered and unchecked, passed within its gates and moved from room to room, he thought each apartment seemed lovelier than the last. There were also trees and flowers more lovely than the eye of man has ever seen, bearing the richest blossom and the sweetest fruit. The whole building blazed with gold and precious stones. The fact that it was full moon and that the stars were shining in a clear sky added to the loveliness of the scene. And yet, perhaps the most beautiful sight of all was Pushpaka, the wondrous car, adorned with carvings of fruit and flowers, birds and beasts, inlaid with gold and gems. And what surpassed all the rest was a figure of Lakshmi, seated on a pool of water and holding a lotus in her hand.[1] This was the car obtained by Rāvana as a reward for his great asceticism and devout contemplation. It was of vast extent, containing many spacious rooms. It is said that the steeds which drew it were ugly-faced goblins, 'with winkless and rolling eyes.' But the statement is also made that the car rose and fell in the air in

[1] Lakshmi is the goddess of prosperity or good fortune.

obedience to its master's will.[1] As the poet proceeds, he becomes highly mysterious in his description of this car. In one canto he says the car was standing within the palace grounds. In another it would appear that the palace, with its lake and groves, is itself contained within the car. Hanumān wandered all over it admiring its beauties. But he did not for a moment forget his main object. He was searching everywhere for Sītā, and there was not a space as broad as one's hand, to which he did not extend his enquiries.

Hanuman in Ravana's Zenana

Naturally he made his way to the women's apartments of the palace. By the time he got there, night had fallen, and all the ladies were asleep. Thousands of female forms met the monkey's gaze. They were lying in every posture, some of them clasping to their breasts their musical instruments or, it might be, the limb of a companion. Or they were lying in one another's laps, with jewels and garlands and waist-belts torn and broken. It was a most topsy-turvy scene. Manifestly these women were sleeping off the effects of drink and lust; and yet they were all lovely and full of grace. Not one of them was of low birth. They were the daughters of gods, royal sages, Brāhmins, Gandharvas and demons.[2] Some of them had come to Lankā of their own accord, others had been brought captives. But whatever the cause that brought them, they were of one mind in loving Rāvana. Hanumān searched anxiously among this sleeping multitude, but he concluded that none of them was Sītā. At one end of the great apartment, however, he saw an elevated platform with a costly bed over which was suspended a white umbrella, and on either side female

[1] The reader will remember that Rāvana came to the hermitage in this car when he carried of Sītā, and that the car was destroyed by Jatāyus, when he, failed to deliver the princess. A later passage speaks as if nothing had happened to the aeroplane, and so again we have it here. The car was formerly the property of the god Kuvera, and Rāvana stole it from that deity. In canto 9 we read that Vishvakarmā the architect of the gods, made it for Brahmā, and that Brahmā gave it to Kuvera, as a reward for his 'high austerities.' The car had golden staircases and its windows were made of crystal and gold.

[2] See Book v. chaps. 9, 11, and 12.

figures with fans in their hands. On this bed lay the mighty form of Rāvana, and as he looked, Hanumān started back afraid. Rāvana breathed like a serpent, we are told, and out of his mouth came the odour of the food and drink he had consumed.[1] Around the bedstead of the king there lay more wives, who had fallen asleep just where they had sat or lain, and it is said of them also that they were sleeping off the effects of love and liquor. There was one woman, her name was Mandodarī, who was so exquisitely beautiful that Hanumān concluded she must be Sītā. The thought that he had been successful in his search made the monkey so happy that he began to slap his arms with his hands. He also kissed his tail and jumped and danced and sang. But very soon he changed his mind, for, as he said, it was not possible that Sītā should eat or drink or sleep or wear ornaments in the absence of her husband. His joy was therefore quickly changed to sadness. He felt that he had searched everywhere and yet there was no trace of Sītā. Not unnaturally he concluded that she must be dead. Probably in her struggles to get free, she had fallen out of Rāvana's arms as he was coursing through the air, and was now lying at the depths of the sea. Or in his passion Rāvana might have crushed to death her fragile form or, when she spurned his suit, he may have put her to death and eaten her tender flesh. It must be so, he thought, but how was he to go to Rāma and tell him such a mournful tale. It would be a fatal blow. Rāma would die of grief, Lakshmana would die of grief, and Bharata and Shatrughna and Sugrīva too would die. And if the monkey king died, his wives and relatives, in fact, the whole monkey race would commit suicide. Hanumān felt that he would be left alone. He would become a hermit in the woods. But that could not

[1] It is difficult to summarize these most unpleasant passages. Vālmiki's picture of the sleeping wives of Rāvana, hugging musical instruments and lying like pigs in a stall, includes suggestions which are much better left unexpressed. Mr. Griffith's version has given to it a charm that is not to be found in the original poem.

last. He too would commit suicide by starvation or drowning or by means of the burning fire.[1] But even as he spoke thus with himself, he noticed that there was one place which had so far escaped his search. And it was a garden full of Ashoka trees, the very garden in which the reader will remember Rāvana had placed Sītā. With hope revived Hanumān entered the sacred grove.[2] And as he did so he bowed his head in worship to the gods, Rudra, Indra, Yama, Vāyu, the Sun and Moon, Agni, the Maruts, Brahmā, Varuna, the Ashwins, Prajāpati, and to all beings. That his prayer might be thoroughly comprehensive, he added 'and others although not specified in the scriptures.' In this act of devotion he also included the names of Rāma, Lakshmana, Sītā, and Sugrīva, the monkey-king. His prayer was that these all might crown his efforts with success.

Sita is found

No purpose would be served by describing the beauties of the grove or of the palace in which Sītā was imprisoned. It is enough to say that it was as beautiful as the celebrated gardens of Indra and Kuvera. By the time he reached the grove, morning had come. And even as he entered and had concealed himself among the branches of a tree, the monkey saw at long last the object of his search. She was seated on the ground, wearing nothing but a soiled cloth. Thin and emaciated as a result of long fasts, Sītā was weeping and sighing, broken with sorrow and her eyes full of tears. On every side of her there stood great bands of female Rākshasas. These creatures were of the most repulsive appearance. Some had big ears; some had none at all.

[1] The religious books forbid suicide, but death by starvation was considered a meritorious end to the life of a hermit. Some commentators of the *Laws of Manu* speak of death by drowning and fire as being practiced. We have seen that Hanumān discussed the prospect of these three kinds of death. The *Mahābhārata* (Books 15 and 17) describes the self immolation of Dhritarāshtra and the Pāndus' *great departure* (Mahāprasthāna) which ends in death. See *Summary of Laws of Manu*. p. 62.

[2] It should be added that in the midst of his despondency Hanumān recovered sufficiently to resolve that, instead of dying, he would make an effort to kill Rāvana, and present his body to Rāma as an offering, even as men offer beasts in sacrifice to Pashupat the lord of beasts, that is, to Shiva.

Some had only one eye; others had only one ear. There were demons with the heads of horses, cows, camels, tigers, and the bodies of other animals. Legs and tails were equally misplaced. Apparently one single fiend might have the head of a cow, the legs of an elephant, the tail of a monkey and the ears of a lion. And they seemed to spend their time consuming strong drink and the flesh of beasts. To add to their repulsiveness, the bodies of all were covered with blood. No wonder Hanumān began to meditate on the power of Destiny as he looked upon a lady so full of loveliness and virtue, surrounded by such awful fiends.[1] The poet adds words which deserve to be quoted in full: 'Her heart did not lose its loftiness in consequence of her husband's prowess. And Sītā of the dark blue eyes was protected by virtue of her own character.'[2]

Ravana visits Sita

The scene now changes to the palace of Rāvana. With the coming of dawn pious demons had begun the new day's worship with their chanting of the Vedas. It is said that these fiends were '*conversant with the six supplementary parts of the Vedas*,'[3] engaged as they were '*in the performance of sacrificial rites and knowing Brahma.*' The voices of the worshippers awoke Rāvana from his drunken sleep. But he did not awake to join in the service of praise and prayer. His first thoughts were of Sītā, and love so filled his heart that he set off immediately for the garden of Ashoka. He was resolved to make one more attempt to break her purpose and achieve his own unholy desires. He was accompanied by his wives. The ladies went just as

[1] In a long passage, where Hanumān repeats to himself the story of Sītā he says that were the sovereignty of the three worlds (heaven, earth and hell) set in the balance against *one hundredth part* of Sītā, the sovereignty of the three worlds would not be worth taking. (c. 16).

[2] Dutt's translation, p. 945.

[3] The six supplementary parts of the Vedas, are the *anga* or limbs for supporting the Veda, hence called the Vedānga. They are: (1) Kalpa, a ceremonial directory; (2) Shikshā, the science of pronunciation; (3) Chhandas metre; (4) Nirukta, exposition of difficult passages; (5) Vyākarana grammar; (6) Jyotisha, astronomy. Those who wonder at such piety among fiends must not forget Rāvana's own great asceticism.

they were, with hair dishevelled and ornaments awry, dripping with perspiration and reeling with sleep and strong drink. They were attended by no less than one hundred handmaidens carrying fans and chowries, a jewelled bowl filled with wine, jars of gold containing drinking water, a white umbrella with ribs of gold, and most wonderful of all a golden throne for his majesty to sit on when he felt disposed. Hanumān was so dazzled with the 'effulgence of the Rākshasas', that he hid himself more carefully among the leaves of the tree in which he was sitting. But he was determined to hear and see all that passed between Sītā and Rāvana. When the queen of Ayodhyā saw her tormentor, she cried aloud and covered her body as much as she could with her hands and feet. In a long address Rāvana pleaded for her love. His wives were the most beautiful creatures to be found in heaven, earth and hell. But she would be the first among them all, nay, he would make them her humble servants, if she would consent to satisfy her desires in him. He reminded her of his power, though he declared he would not use it against her, and said that he would conquer the earth, and bestow its sceptre upon her father, Janaka. He would gather every jewel that was to be found throughout the three worlds ; he would give her everything she asked for—and that was with him an easy task, because he had conquered both gods and demons in battle—if she would forsake her former spouse. He asked with scorn what could Rāma give her now ; Rāma was dwelling as an ascetic in the forest. He could give her nothing but clothes of bark. But even in asceticism, as well as in wealth and power, Rāma was greatly his inferior. [1] And then he added a well-turned compliment, that when the architect of the gods had created her, he gave up trying to create any more like her, because the task was beyond him. Even Brahmā, the grandfather of the gods, was moved when he beheld her. By these appeals, Sītā was of course

1 His argument of course was that as a result of his 10,000 years of asceticism, he had secured from Brahmā the boon which was the source of all Sita's and Rāma's woes.

unmoved. But she gave a very spirited reply. She told Rāvana that he was both vicious and illiterate, that ruin befell the man who persecuted the wives of other men, and that he need not think to tempt her with the story of his power and wealth. As the rays of the sun belonged to the sun, so did she belong to Rāma. She had laid her head on Ramā's breast and she would never lay it on the breast of any other man. But she was kind enough to warn him of the destruction which would befall him if he did not speedily repent of his wicked conduct. He might evade the thunderbolt of heaven, he might evade the clutches of Yama the lord of Death, but he could not and would not be able to escape from Rāma's wrath. Did he never think of the many thousands of his followers who had already fallen by the strength of Rāma's arm? He was a dog opposing a tiger, a hare contending with an elephant, and he would never have been able to capture her if he had not made use of trickery and deceit. But Rāma was full of mercy and compassion. If he took her back even now, and begged for pardon, her husband's noble heart would be certain to forgive.

Ravana threatens Sita

When one remembers that Rāvana was a Rākshasa, he made a very meek reply. He pointed out that she well deserved being put to death, for making such a harsh and rude reply. But love was a wonderful thing, and although he was angry, she was still the object of his kindness and love. As a rule the more a man loved a woman the more did he bring her under his control. But apparently in her case the result was the very opposite. The more kindly he treated her the more rudely did she rebuff him. However, he would argue with her no more. And so he issued his ultimatum. If she did not yield herself to his embraces within the space of two months, 'my cooks shall mince thy flesh with steel, and serve thee for my morning meal.' The reader will remember that Rāvana had already uttered this threat when he first brought Sītā to Lankā. But to all his threatenings she only answered more courageously than

before, and asked if he had no friends to advise him against such mingled wickedness and folly. She could not understand why his tongue did not fall out of his mouth, nor why a curse did not fall upon his eyes, for the lascivious looks they cast upon her. And then she made a strange statement. It was to the effect that she could by her curses reduce him to ashes. But she restrained herself for two reasons. Firstly, the demon was fated to die by Rāma's hand, so the gods had already decreed, and secondly, as far as one can understand the text, the use of curses destroyed the fruit of man's ascetic toil. [1] This fierce reply made Rāvana very angry. He told her that he would have her put to death that very day. But nevertheless, he turned to the vile she-devils who guarded Sītā and told them to use every threat and blandishment that might bend her to his will. As he turned to go one of the fiends cast her arms round his neck and said, 'Why don't you sport with me instead? The man who seeks to force a woman against her will, is playing with fire. You will be infinitely happier with one who is ready to do what you desire. It is not the will of the gods that she should enjoy your wealth and valour.' Rāvana could not help laughing as he went off to his palace, but nevertheless he loved Sītā still.

The she-fiends threaten Sita

In obedience to the instruction which they had received, Sītā's guardians used every argument they could think of to change her purpose. They asked her if she realized what a great honour Rāvana proposed for her, to be the wife of the ten-necked grandson of Pulastya. And they reminded her that Pulastya was one of the six Prajāpatis, and a mind-born son of the god Brahmā. [2]

[1] The words in Mr. Dutt's translation are: 'O ten-necked one, I can instantly reduce thee to ashes, but for Rāma's mandate and my ascetic observances.' It was a very healthy teaching that when ascetics cursed their enemies, they injured themselves as well as their foes. Both the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* refer to this.

[2] See Note 4 for an account of the Prajāpatis, or secondary creators of the present universe. They are more usually spoken of as ten in number, though the description of creation in the third book of this poem says there were twenty-one.

Had she heard how Rāvana fought with and overcame the Thirty-three gods [1] with the Gandharvas and Nāgas as well? Rāvana was so great and awful a being that in his presence the wind did not dare to blow, nor the sun to shine, while in obedience to his will trees showered down their blossom and the clouds gave abundance of rain. Was it possible that she could refuse her favours to such a noble creature, who came from his gorgeous palace, crowded with not less than one thousand queens, to pay her adoration and lay at her feet the treasures of the three worlds. And for whom was she refusing all this? She was doing it for the sake of a mere man, a disinherited prince, living a life of poverty and hardship, alone in a jungle, with all his purposes and hopes overthrown. Weeping bitterly, Sitā replied to these bitter taunts, by telling her persecutors that they could eat her up if they chose, but she would never listen to their wicked words. Her husband was her lord, her life itself, and she would cling to him for ever. Their advice was entirely opposed to the teaching of custom, and she would strive to emulate the examples set by Rohini, Damayanti and Sāvitri, in faithfulness and devotion. [2] This answer naturally led to fresh arguments and threats. There was one she-fiend in particular who reminded her of the shortness of life and the quick passing of youth. If she did not satisfy her desires now, she would never have the opportunity again, for not even Indra, the lord

[1] The thirty-three gods have been frequently referred to. This is a harking back to Vedic times. The Rig Veda says there are thirty-three gods. See Note 3.

The Gandharvas were the minstrels of heaven. They along with the Nāgas or serpent-gods, appear to have assisted the gods in the many battles which they waged with Dānavas, Daityas, Asuras, Rākshasās and other wicked fiends. The strange thing is that these wicked creatures indulged in all the rites of religion, without any thought of improving their character and conduct. And the asceticism of Rāvana, while it could compel Brahmā to grant the boon he sought, never exercised any influence on his heart.

[2] Sītā mentions no less than ten distinguished wives. Rohini was the wife of the Moon, and is often spoken of as an ideal illustration of wifely devotion. Among human beings, Damayanti and Sāvitri were with justice reckoned as the finest examples of earthly wives. Damayanti and Sāvitrī were the wives of Nala and Satyavān. Their stories are told in the *Mahābhārata* See Summary pp. 63. 97.

Arundhati, wife of Vasishtha, Lopamudra, wife of Agastya, and Shrimati, wife of Kapila, are other names.

of the celestials, could hope to achieve her deliverance. She ended by telling the poor captive that she would tear out her heart and eat it, if she did not follow her advice. Other females joined in this cruel threat, boasting of how they would enjoy eating the different parts of her body, which they specified with nauseating detail. But from these cruel threats they quickly turned to other pleasures, calling for strong drink, which they said was the extinguisher of sorrow and grief.

Trijata's dreams

There was, however, one she-fiend called Trijatā, 'both wise and old,' who intervened with words of caution and rebuke. She said they might eat themselves, if they liked, or they could eat her, but they must not think of eating Sītā. And then she began to tell them of an awful dream which she had the night before, and which made her hair stand on end. The dream foretold the overthrow of the whole Rākshasa race and the defeat of Rāvana. She had seen Rāma and Lakshmana travelling through the air in a chariot drawn by one hundred horses. They were both clothed in white raiment and adorned with garlands. They were manifestly coming to join Sītā, who was sitting on a hill as white as snow. The scene suddenly changed and she again saw Rāma and Lakshmana, riding on a great elephant with four tusks and once more they were coming to meet Sītā, who when she had embraced her husband took her seat beside him on the elephant. There was still a third vision of Rāma with Sītā and Lakshmana, driving quickly towards the north and travelling in a car drawn by eight white bullocks. On the other hand she saw Rāvana falling from his chariot headlong to the earth, where he was seized by a woman who dragged him rudely along the ground. In his case also, the scene changed quickly more than once, and he appeared in a chariot, drawn by asses, drinking oil and dancing. In contrast to Rāma's, his chariot was journeying towards the south, where is the land of death and the citadel of Yama. And yet again Rāvana appeared, raging like a madman and falling into heaps of dung,

There were many other evil omens, that she saw in her dream, including a vision of Lankā being submerged by the ocean. For all these very good reasons Trijatā advised her companions not to persecute or threaten Sītā any more. It would be much wiser to appease her wrath and ask for her forgiveness. Sitā listened to the story of these omens with great delight, and as a further proof that they would soon be fulfilled her left eye as well as her left arm and thigh began to throb. As her jailors gathered round her and cast themselves upon her mercy she promised to save them all from destruction, if Trijata's words came true.

Hanuman addresses Sita

All this time, Hanumān had been sitting on the tree watching and listening to all that he saw and heard. As the fiends had moved some little distance and left their captive comparatively alone, he felt that his opportunity had come. But he was very much afraid that when he began to speak Sītā might run away or give a shriek of terror which would ruin all. Another consideration was the language he ought to use. It was scarcely proper for him to use Sanskrit like a Brāhmin, when he was only a monkey, and Sītā, besides might think that it was Rāvana come in another guise. And so he decided to use the language of a common man.[1] But even as he addressed himself to speak another cause for hesitation arose. He felt it was a great sin for him to speak to Sītā. But happily he decided that it would be a still greater sin if he did not speak, for it would mean that she would die. There was not another monkey in existence able to jump the seven hundred miles that lay between India and Ceylon. When he did begin to speak, however, the monkey confined himself to general discourse, in which he sang the

[1] In commenting on this passage, Muir remarks, 'As the reason assigned in these passages for not addressing Sītā in Sanskrit, such as a Brāhmin would use, is not that she would not understand it, but that it would alarm her and be unsuitable to the speaker,' (being only a monkey) 'we must take them as indicating that Sanskrit, if not spoken by women of the upper classes at the time when the *Rāmāyana* was written (whenever that may have been) was at least understood by them and was commonly spoken by men of the priestly class, and other educated persons.' See *Original Sanskrit Texts*, vol. 2. p. 166.

praises of Rāma, and told all that had happened to him both before and after the loss of Sītā. The princess was greatly startled by hearing a voice speaking from the tree, and her amazement was increased when she found that the speaker was a huge and ugly monkey.[1] Repeating the names of Rāma and Lakshmana, she began to weep. She was sure that she must be dreaming, though she hoped she was not, because learned people said it was most unlucky to see monkeys in a dream. But as she went on gazing she realised that it was a real monkey that she saw before her, and taking the names of Brahmā, Agni, Indra and the god of speech, she prayed that it might be so. By this time the monkey had got down from the tree, and with joined hands was standing meekly by her side. Asking her why she wept he expressed the opinion that she could not be the daughter of a mortal, and begged her to declare the name of her distinguished sire.[2] Might he hazard the guess that she was Rohini, the wife of the moon god, or Arundhati the wife Vashishtha. But when he thought of it, she must be the daughter of an ordinary man, because the gods never wept and they never touched the ground with their feet, and she did both. Besides he had heard her utter Rāma's name. She must be Sītā. Her unrivalled beauty, her ascetic garb, her distress and suffering proved that she must be. He begged her to say if that was not so. This question led to a lengthy reply in Sītā's part, in which we learn that twelve years had passed from the date of her marriage to the time Rāma was sent into exile. But Sītā had many doubts and for a long time she alternated between hope and fear. She continued to ask if it was not possible that Rāvana was once more seeking to deceive her. She was only finally convinced that she was in truth listening to a messenger from her husband,

[1] The poet has forgotten that Hanumān had contracted himself to the size of a cat.

[2] The monkey asked if she belonged to the celestials Asuras (demons), Nāgas (snake-deities), Gandharvas, Yakshas, or Kinnars, or was she a child of the Rudras, Vasus or Maruts?

when Hanumān entered into the most elaborate description of Rāma's person, beauty, virtues and accomplishments, and ended by presenting her with Rāma's own ring.[1] He also explained how in obedience to Rāma's command the monkey race had searched the universe in vain; and how, when all hope had been abandoned, they had learned from Sampāti, a brother of Jatāyus, of Sītā's imprisonment in Lankā.

Hanuman offers to carry Sita back to India

As Sītā listened to Hanumān's description of his leap across the straits, she confessed that her husband's messenger was not an ordinary monkey, when he could treat such a wonderful distance as nothing more than a cow's step. But she could not understand why Rāma was not there himself to rescue her. When she had poured out a long series of questions for whose answer she did not wait, the monkey explained that Rāma was still ignorant of her whereabouts. Whenever he heard that she was a prisoner in Lankā, she might rest assured that there would not be a moment's delay. Her husband would build a bridge across the straits[2] and come to her deliverance. Lankā[3] and all its demon inhabitants would very soon be destroyed, even though the gods, with Death at their head, attempted to stand in the way. As for the extent of Rāma's grief, he explained that not only had he given up the use of meat and liquor, but he was so much distraught in mind, that he did 'not drive away even flies, insects

[1] Here are some of the things Hanumān said about Rāma. He upheld dignity of the four castes. He followed right in all his ways. He was worshipped by all like the sun. In patience he was like the earth and in intellect like Brihaspati. He was well acquainted with his royal duties and abode by the commandments of the Brahmins. He was the master of the Yajur Veda and was adored by those who were well versed in the Vedas. He was proficient in the science of the bended bow, Vedas and Vedāngas.

He was the protector of the world and of his own kinsmen. His throat was plump and his eyes were red. He had the voice of a bugle and was of a green colour. His armpits, belly, breast, nose, shoulders and forehead were high, etc. See Dutt's translation, p. 989 from which these quotations are made. A later passage says of Lakshmana's person that it was of golden hue, while that of Rāma was green! Some of the details regarding Rāma's person are of such a character that they do not permit of repetition.

[2] 'By means of his terrible shafts,' the poet says.

[3] 'Lankā, which is now full of pious ceremonies,' said Hanumān. See Dutt's translation, p. 967.

and snakes from his body,'[1] while if sleep ever visited his eyelids, he was awake again in a moment with the cry of Sītā! Sītā! on his hungry lips. This graphic story of her husband's grief filled Sītā's heart with mingled joy and sorrow. She told him that he had given her a cup filled with amrita and poison to drink. And there was, she added, one fact that must not be forgotten. Her sufferings had already lasted ten months. If Rāma did not come before the close of another two, she must yield herself to Rāvana or die. To this appeal Hanumān responded by saying that he would gladly take Sītā on his back and carry her off to India right away. If she agreed to this, she would have the unspeakable joy of looking on Rāma's face that very day.

Sita refuses the offer

Sītā apparently had doubts as to Hanumān's powers, and no wonder, when the creature standing before her was no bigger than a cat. And she laughingly asked how any one with so small a body could carry her so far. This jest hurt Hanumān's feelings considerably, and he at once began to swell out into his natural size, as large as Mount Mandara, and looking like a blazing fire. When he asked if the princess had any further doubts, Sītā was full of many apologies, but she declined to accept his invitation. She was afraid that the rapid movement through the air would make her giddy. She would be sure to fall off his shoulders and be drowned in the sea. Or the demons would follow them and insist on fighting, and Hanumān had no weapons. He could not both fight and protect her at the same time. Were anything to happen to him before Rāma was informed of her whereabouts, all his past endeavours and successes would go for nothing. But her last excuse was, without doubt, her chief reason for refusal. Rāvana had forced her to touch him, and she had already crossed the straits, an unwilling victim

1 'Rāghava does not take meat nor drink honey.' Dutt's translation, p. 995. 'For thee are meat and wine forsworn.' Griffith's translation, p. 415. His only food at this time was an evening meal of boiled rice and such wild fruits as are sanctioned by the Shāstras.

in his arms. But she would never willingly or of her own consent, touch the body of any living person except Rāma's. She would wait where she was till Rāma brought her deliverance. She had seen his power and it was at his hands and his hands only that she would desire relief. Hanumān expressed his great admiration for this noble answer. In fact he had never expected any other reply. He had only made his proposal with a view to testing the greatness of her soul. She was the very incarnation of modesty and virtue, and he would be sure to tell her husband every word that she had said. But before he returned he must ask her for some token by which Rāma would certainly know that he had met and spoken with her. In reply, Sitā handed to the monkey a gem which she had managed to conceal in her garment, and repeated at length the story of the crow which had given so much trouble in Dandaka. If he repeated it to Rāma it would serve a double purpose. None but Rāma and herself were acquainted with the incident, and its narration would be a further proof that it was Sitā that Hanumān had seen. But in addition to that, it would remind him of his desire in happier days to save her from every trouble, and urge him, if that were needed, to what was now a much more urgent and more weighty task.[1]

Hanuman's miraculous exploits

Hanumān was now ready to depart. But before he went he thought he would like to do some damage and even engage in battle with the forces of Rāvana. As he said, neither bribery nor intrigue nor conciliation would be of any use. The only argument a demon understood was the argument force. And so to begin with he destroyed the beautiful garden, in which Sītā was kept a prisoner, leaving nothing uninjured except the tree beneath whose shadow the princess sat. The fiends who were on guard asked Sītā who the monkey was, but she denied all knowledge of him, saying she supposed he was a Rākshasa, and

[1] The reader will find the story of the crow that persecuted Sītā in Book II.

as they knew, a Rakshasa could assume any shape he chose. Filled with horror and alarm, the demons rushed to Rāvana's presence and told him of the damage the monkey had done. They added that they had seen him speaking to Sītā and were convinced that he had come from the gods Indra and Kuvera, or possibly even that he was a spy sent by Rāma, and looking for his queen. Rāvana grew very angry as he listened to their story. He even wept with rage and his eyes looked like blazing fires. He had a body-guard of eighty thousand demons, and these he ordered to go at once, and either capture or slay the bold intruder. When Hanumān saw them advance, he was not the least afraid. Crying aloud that he was the humble slave of Rāma, and that his name was Hanumān, the Wind-god's son, he swore that he would slay them all, and not only them but a thousand Rāvanas as strong as their master. And so indeed it came to pass. In a very brief space of time and with very little difficulty, Hanumān had killed the whole eighty thousand demons. While fresh troops were being prepared in terrified Lankā, to send forth against him, Hanumān employed his time in the destruction of a temple which the Rākshasas had erected for the worship of their gods. [1] He uprooted one of its many pillars and used it as the weapon with which he slew its hundred guards. He boasted the while of how Rāma and Sugrīva with countless hordes of monkeys would raze Lankā to the ground. By this time a great army under the leadership of a demon called Jambuvāli had appeared. He was held to be the bravest and most competent of all Rāvana's generals. In the battle which ensued Hanumān was badly wounded, and it was not until he had uprooted first a mountain peak and then a tree of great proportions, that he achieved the destruction of his opponents.

[1] Mr. Dutt's translation reads as follows, 'the edifice dedicated to the deities of the Rākshasas,' p. 1018. Who these deities were is not stated, but from various references it may be inferred that one of them was Shivā.

When the news of Jambuvāli's death reached Rāvana, he sent out at first seven, and then five, of his most distinguished captains, attended in each case by large armies, but with the same disastrous results. Hanumān, by this time, had enlarged himself to a most appalling size, and he trod them under foot, or crushed them with his huge body. It should be mentioned that before sending out the five captains, Rāvana felt it expedient to add words of caution. It was manifest, he said, that Hanumān was not a monkey. He was of the opinion that Indra had produced him probably by means of his ascetic merit. Or the gods, along with the Nāgas, Asuras and great rishis, were involved. He had put them all to flight in the past, and this was their way of paying off old scores. But he would remind his brave warriors of their age-long prowess. Let them show equal courage now and all would be well. Nevertheless, they must not forget the uncertainty of warfare, and the fact that this animal seemed to possess the strength of those highly distinguished monkeys, Bāli and Sugriva, creatures not to be treated with contempt, and capable of changing their shape at will. But Rāvana's advice and warning were both in vain. A long and bloody battle ensued. It is true that Hanumān was badly wounded and lost a great deal of blood. But he finally ended the combat by uprooting a mountain with its snakes, wild beasts and trees still on it, and casting it on the top of his enemies. They were all crushed to powder with horses, elephants, chariots and weapons.

Hanuman destroys twelve of Ravana's armies

With so many of his generals slain, Rāvana felt it necessary to call upon members of his own family to take the field, and his younger son Aksha was first of all summoned to lead a fresh army against the foe. The car in which this youth travelled was a most remarkable structure, made of gold for the most part and adorned with precious gems. It was drawn by eight horses, as quick as thought and

Hanuman kills a son of Ravana

able to fly in the air, according to the will of their master. Neither gods nor demons had ever been able to conquer these steeds. The fight that took place was quite a unique event, and created so much interest in all parts of the universe that both gods and Asuras came to witness it. Nature herself was equally impressed, for we are told that the sun ceased to burn, the wind stopped blowing and the earth trembled. Aksha and his army were almost consumed by the heat of Hanumān's anger, but it is manifest that the monkey found it as much as he could do to conquer his opponents. As he himself put it, 'If I don't kill Aksha, he will kill me.' Eventually, when the car and its eight steeds had been destroyed, both the combatants (nothing more is said of the Rākshasa forces) found themselves fighting high up in the air. No purpose would be served in giving further details of the battle. It is enough to add that Hanumān caught Aksha by the leg and hurled him to the ground. When he reached the earth, he was already dead. Every bone and muscle in his body was broken. The gods were greatly impressed by this great feat of Hanumān's, and came, with Indra at their head, to gaze at him with open-eyed wonder.

Hanuman taken captive by Indrajit

Rāvana had another son called Indrajīt, or the conqueror of Indra, and with great bitterness of heart, he commanded him also to go out against Hanumān. This young man was addressed at great length by his father and, according to his father's account, he seems to have been a most remarkable person. He had fought with and put to flight the gods. With the exception of himself, every living thing in the three worlds got tired and weary. He was acquainted with all the arts of war and government. Everything laid down in Scripture was open to his understanding. His ascetic merit was equal to Rāvana's own. And best of all, he had a weapon, consecrated by sacred verses from the holy books, which he had got from

Brahmā.[1] The divine virtues which this wonderful weapon possessed he was always to keep prominent in his thoughts. And very soon, Hanumān discovered its marvellous powers. It is called a bow, as well as a weapon, but it is also spoken of as being discharged at Hanumān. In any case, very soon after the battle began, it was made use of with disastrous effects. And when it was discharged, Hanumān felt himself at once bound and helpless. Indeed he became quite incapable of motion and fell to the ground. Nor was he ignorant of what had happened. He knew it was the Brahmā weapon which held him fast, and he told himself that what had taken place was decreed by Brahmā, and that he could not deliver himself. At the same time, he was confident that he would come to no harm, protected as he was by Brahmā himself, as well as by Indra and Vāyu. When the Rākshasas saw the monkey lying helpless on the ground, they were naturally very jubilant, and rushing forward, began to tie his limbs firmly with cotton and bark. This was the most foolish thing the Rākshasas could have done. Because it is said that when a person held bound by the '*binding force of a Brahmā weapon*,' is bound by any other thing, then the Brahmā weapon loses its power. When Indrajīt came up and saw what had happened, he was greatly disappointed to find that all his effort had been made in vain. But it does not appear that he said anything, while Hanumān continued to act as if he were still helpless, and allowed the Rākshasas to seize and carry him to the presence of Rāvana.

Hanuman as Rama's ambassador

The appearance and dignity of this ten-headed demon made a great impression on the monkey and he could not prevent himself from openly expressing his wish that such a glorious and auspicious looking creature had devoted his strength to works of righteousness. When asked who he was, in a variety of

[1] The reader will remember that the celestial weapons which Rāma received, in an earlier part of the poem, included a Brahmā weapon. As the reader will discover later, Indrajit used this weapon against Rāma and Lakshmana, with similar results.

questions indicating the belief that he must be an emissary of one of the gods, he replied that he was a messenger of Sugriva's, and, as a later canto clearly shews, in making that statement, he claimed the rights and privileges of an ambassador. And certainly when he was cross-questioned, he took full advantage of his privileged position. In addition to telling a great deal about Rāma, Sitā and Sugriva, he exhorted the demon king to repent of his evil action in carrying off another man's wife. He laid emphasis on the fact that Rāvana had acquired a very great deal of ascetic merit, and it would be a pity to lose the benefit of what he had so laboriously gained. Persons in his lofty position should not be guilty of an act opposed to righteousness, one which was the source of countless evils, but he supposed Rāvana was trusting to the boon he had obtained from Brahmā, to the effect that neither gods nor demons would ever be able to destroy him. Well, in answer to that, he must remember that Rāma and Sugriva were neither gods nor demons. The one was a man, and the other was a monkey. And it was absolutely certain that the two, whom he had named, would bring about his death. Hanumān, thereupon, began to indulge in the usual panegyric of Rāma's power. There was not to be found anywhere one who could hope to compete with him. He was the equal of the god Vishnu in greatness. Brahmā Svayambhu with the four faces, Rudra of the three eyes, and Indra the king of the gods, could successfully oppose him.[1] Ramā, if he wished, could destroy the present universe and create another in its place. It was somewhat of an anti-climax when Hanumān added that, were it in conformity with Rāma's wish, he himself would not

[1] Brahmā is very frequently referred to as the 'four-faced,' or the 'four headed.' It is said he had originally five heads, but one of them was burnt off by the fire of Shiva's central eye. The three-eyed, the blue-throated, the five-faced, are all names of Rudra or Shiva. 'The name Shiva is a unknown to the Vedas, but Rudra, another name of this deity occurs in the Vedas, both in the singular and plural, and from these the great god Shiva and his manifestations, the Rudras, have been developed.' Dowson's *Hindu Mythology*, p. 296.

find it difficult to tackle Lankā single-handed, and destroy everything within its walls.

Not unnaturally, Rāvana was beside himself with anger at what he felt to be a most insulting speech, and he gave orders that Hanumān should be put to death. But the demon had a brother, called Vibhīshan, who had a very high reputation for piety and righteousness, and had all along disapproved of Rāvana's treatment of Sītā.[1] Vibhīshan now interposed with the claim that it would be very wrong to kill an envoy. Ambassadors' lives were sacred. It was contrary to the teachings of morality and the practice of men to do such a thing. Besides it was most undesirable for a king to give way to anger as Rāvana had done. What was the use of studying the Scriptures if he did not control his temper. When Rāvana interjected the remark that it was not a sin to kill the sinful, Vibhishan replied that when an envoy discharged his duty faithfully and in accordance with rule, as Hanumān had done, he ought not, on any consideration, to be put to death.[2] He then went on to say that there was no one to equal Rāvana either in '*religious discussion*,' or in 'appropriating the right sense of the scriptures,'[3] and it would be a matter for great regret if he should make such an error of judgement now. He had never killed any of the gods and Daityas whom he had overthrown, and he must not begin his work of killing by killing a monkey. And the monkey, after all, was not speaking for himself, but for those who

Hanuman sentenced to death

[1] In her conversation with Hanumān, Sitā told how she had heard that Vibhīshan had begged Rāvana to restore Sītā to her husband. Her informant was Nandā, a daughter of this Rākshasa.

[2] It is difficult to accept the argument. If Hanumān was an ambassador to Rāvana, he ought not to have held a secret meeting with Sītā. Nor should he have set the grove on fire and killed the demons, if he was afterwards to claim the privileges of an ambassador.

[3] One is surprised to find such pious qualities being attributed to a wicked demon. They are in line with the temples and Brāhmins acquainted with the Vedas that were to be found in Lankā. And the reader will remember that Rāvana had been a very eminent ascetic. His ten thousand years of asceticism secured from Brahmā the boon which rendered necessary Vishnu's incarnation as Rāma.

had sent him, and whose mouthpiece he was. Besides they wanted Rāma and Lakshmana to come to Lankā, so that they might destroy them. But if their messenger was destroyed, how would the princes know where to come. It was most desirable therefore, from every point of view to let Hanumān escape with his life.

Rāvana was unable to deny the force of his brother's arguments, but he insisted that Hanumān must receive some punishment. And, as a monkey is fonder of his tail than of any other part of his person, he proposed that they should set it on fire. Hanumān would return very crest-fallen to India, if he had to go without a tail. He would be ashamed to show himself before his friends and kinsfolk. And so the Rākshasas wound round the monkey's tail old pieces of cloth that had been steeped in oil and set it on fire. Hanumān was still bound and, as his captors thought, unable to free himself from his bonds. He was led along the streets of Lankā. Great crowds followed him everywhere, blowing trumpets and shells. Some of Sītā's guards ran to tell her of her friend's ignominious fate, led through the streets of Lankā with his tail on fire. The tender-hearted princess was deeply grieved, but she prayed to the god of Fire, with the result that Hanumān ceased to feel any pain, while Vāyu, the wind god, sent an ice cold wind which carried health and comfort to his offspring's heart.

Hanuman's tail set on fire

Hanumān did not, of course, remain long in bonds. He quickly snapped the bandages of cotton and bark asunder, and began to range at will over all parts of Lankā. He had by this time also expanded his form to huge dimensions and swung his burning tail in all directions among the palaces and houses of the capital. To the amazement and affright of its inhabitants, building after building was quickly set on fire, until one building alone stood untouched by the flame. It was the palace of Ravana's brother Vibhīshan whose interposition had saved Hanumān's life. It was indeed a terrible sight. Women

Hanuman sets fire to Lanka

with dishevelled hair could be seen flying here and there and everywhere, wives and mothers calling aloud for their husbands and sons. Cries of agony were heard on every hand. And to add to the horrors of the scene, Hanumān seized a mighty rod of iron and, using it as a weapon, went on adding to the multitude of Rākshasas already dead. The streets of the town were running deep with floods of molten gold and silver and blood. Not only was the whole city destroyed, but the country round about was also consumed in a conflagration so great that the only fair comparison is to be found in the catastrophe which befalls the universe when the hour of dissolution comes. [1] When he saw that the destruction was complete, Hanumān went down to the sea shore and dipped his burning tail in the waters of the ocean. But no sooner had he done so than an awful fear seized his heart. In giving way to righteous anger he had forgotten all about Sītā. She too, must have perished in the flames. How foolish he had been. What answer would he give to Rāma? Nay, he had been guilty of Rāma's death, for Rāma could not survive the loss of his queen. But then he remembered that Sītā was as pure as fire, and fire could not destroy itself. And even as he said this, he heard the bards of heaven commenting on the wonderful fact that Sītā was unharmed. Greatly relieved he hurried to the grove to find it indeed true that Sītā was unharmed and unafraid.

[1] There are a number of vague references in the *Rāmāyana* to the dissolution of the universe in some great conflagration, and also to the yugas or ages of the world. But the poem, in this respect, shows a great contrast to the *Mahābhārata* which abounds in detailed references to these great periods of time. There are, according to that poem, four ages, the Krita, Treta, Dwāpara and Kali Yugas, amounting in all to 4,320,000 years. This total is called a Mahāyuga, and 1000 Mahāyugas, or 4,320,000,000 years make a day of Brahmā. The world once created, lasts for a day of Brahmā, and at its close is dissolved in fire, the *dissolution of the universe*. Brahmā, then goes to sleep for a night of Brahmā, another period of 4,320,000,000 years. When he awakes, he begins to create the world anew. According to the *Mahābhārata*, Bk. 12. c. 349, we are living in the seventh creation of Brahmā, or as it is called the seventh birth or cycle of that god. See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, pp. 83, 85, 87, 112, 181, 236. Professor Dowson says 'this elaborate and practically boundless system of chronology, was invented between the age of the *Rig-Veda* and the *Mahābhārata* as there is no trace to be found of it in the hymns of the earlier work.'

Hanuman returns to India

After some words of further farewell and with the assurance of speedy deliverance the monkey set out upon his homeward journey. In making the spring which was to carry him to the other side of the ocean, Hanumān gave such a tremendous leap that the mountain, on which he stood, sank to the level of the surrounding plain. This was the more remarkable as the mountain was not an ordinary hill, but was not less than two hundred and ten miles high. It bore the name of Aristha, and was a favourite haunt of Maharshis, Yakshas, Gandharvas, Kinnaras, serpents and Vidyadhāris, all of whom had to take refuge in the sky. Another passage indicates that the mountain not only sank to the level of the ground but descended to the nether regions. A great loss of life took place among the wild beasts which haunted this mountain, and the yells of pain which the lions, for instance, emitted pierced the very heavens. When he got near the shore of India and beheld in front of him the great mountain Mahendra, Hanumān gave a mighty roar and began to flourish his tail. His friends, who by this time had begun to lose heart, were greatly delighted when they heard his voice. As Jāmbavān said, it was possible to tell by the way he shouted that he must have been successful in his search. Whenever he uttered the words 'I have seen,' the expectant monkeys raised a tremendous shout and began to jump up and down, swinging their tails. As was to be expected Hanumān gave his friends a full account of his experiences in Lankā and of his journey thither. His description of all that he had accomplished single-handed, killing so many thousands of demons and destroying the capital by fire suggested, to Angada that the monkeys should set out for Lankā and bring the princess back themselves, without informing either Rāma or Sugriva. This proposal was however condemned by Jāmbavān, who said they had no authority for so doing. They were only instructed to find out where Sītā was and report their discovery to Rāma and the monkey king.

He therefore insisted that they should repair to Kishkindhā without further loss of time. This they at once proceeded to do, but they were in such exuberant spirits, that on their way they plundered and consumed the honey in a garden called Madhuvān, the property of their king, Sugriva. This honey made the monkeys very drunk, and they almost entirely ruined the garden which was in charge of a monkey named Dadhimukha. Naturally he was very angry, but when he protested against their most improper conduct, his brother monkeys gave him a through beating, biting and scratching him all over his body as well. Dadhimukha, more dead than alive, fled to the presence of Sugriva and told the story of his wrongs, but the ill-used monkey was annoyed to find that the king was not at all displeased, for he at once turned to Rāma and Lakshmana who were present and said, 'This is good news. They must have got word of Sitā, else they would never have laid waste my garden which was given to me by the gods.' As he said this, Sugriva was so delighted that he raised his tail. Naturally Rāma and Lakshmana were full of hope and they urged Dadhimukha to return to the garden and demand that Hanumān should come at once. Hanumān and the others had, by this time, sufficiently recovered from their intoxication to realise that there was need for speed, and it was not long before they were standing in the presence of the anxiously expectant prince.

Hanuman and his friends get drunk

The prince listened eagerly to all that Hanumān had to tell, and the poet once more records the story of his exploits with a detail which does not require to be even smmarized here. But it is worth nothing that when, according to this fresh statement, Sītā told the monkey that of all created beings there were only three who could cross the straits, namely, Garuda the vehicle of Vishnu, Vāyu the wind-god and Hanumān himself, Hanumān replied that there were a great many

Hanuman tells Rama of his Exploits

monkeys in Sugriva's service who could not only jump from India to Lankā at a single bound, but travel round the world.[1] When Hanumān told the story of the crow which he was to repeat as a proof that he had seen the princess and handed to Rāma the jewel which Sītā had sent him, both Rāma and Lakshmana were unable to control their emotion and wept aloud. Placing the jewel on his breast, he told of how her father had given it to her on their wedding day, a pearl of great price got from the bed of the ocean. It was presented originally to Janaka by the god Indra, in reward for a sacrifice with which that deity was greatly pleased. Time and again Rāma begged Hanumān to tell him all that Sītā had said and done. His words, he said, were like water poured upon a man in a faint to restore him to consciousness; like medicine given to the sick. He could not understand how Sītā had been able to live so long; for himself, he felt that in another moment he would die.

[1] He also said that he had promised Sītā to bring Rāma and Lakshmana on his back to Lankā.

BOOK VI

LANKA

Rama reaches the shores of Southern India

The immediately pressing question now was, how Rāma and his friends were to get across to Lankā. We have seen that Hanumān, in his account of his interview with Sītā, told her that not only were there many monkeys capable of jumping across the ocean, but that he himself would bring Rāma and Lakshmana on his back. In the opening cantos of this book, however, we find that Ramā did not appreciate at its full value this statement of Hanumān's. Because he says in a very hopeless fashion that he does not see how either he or the monkeys will ever be able to reach Ceylon. And Sugriva, when he sought to cheer him, had no other proposal than the building of a bridge. This is how he put it. 'Without throwing a bridge over the ocean even the Asuras and the celestials with Indra at their head are unequal to subduing Lankā.' But once the bridge was made he was confident that all their difficulties would be at an end. These cheering words seem to have comforted Rāma greatly, for he replied that he would get over somehow, if not by building a bridge, then by drying up the ocean, or by the practice of asceticism. He then began to cross-examine Hanumān as to the strength and situation of Rāvana's capital. According to the monkey, its walls were impassable, its moats so deep that they could not be fathomed, and its bridges so strong that no one could move them, and all were defended by many millions of fierce demons. But before his description was finished, Hanumān claimed that he had broken down the bridges, filled up the moats and levelled the walls to the ground. Rāma was quite carried away by Hanumān's eloquence, and he proposed that they should set out at once on their undertaking. He then

suggested, as if it were a new idea, that he should mount on Hanumān's back, while his brother Lakshmana should ride on Angada's. The monkeys and bears, hundreds and hundreds of millions in number, were in great glee as they set out. In their excess of joy they went jumping about, knocking one another down, and waving not only their tails but great trees in air. Lakshmana called his brother's attention to the many favourable omens which he had witnessed that day. The sky was cloudless and a grateful wind had begun to blow. The pole star and the Seven Rishis had each a most benign aspect, only equalled by that of their distinguished ancestor, Trishanku, now a star in heaven.[1] After a long march which seems to have occupied more than one day, Rāma and his friends reached the southern shores of India. As the monkeys prepared to settle for the night which was now approaching, Rāma stood gazing across the vast expanse of waters. The sense of separation from his love was more acute than ever, while the tumult of the waves only added to the tempest that rent his heart. It was said that grief grew less and less with the passage of time. But in his case apparently, it was different. Every day added to the greatness of his sorrow. He felt inclined to cast himself into the sea that the fire of his suffering might burn no more. When Lakshmana had tried his best to comfort the broken-hearted prince, the two brothers turned their thoughts to the task of evening prayer.

Ravana in council

The scene now changes to Lankā where Rāvana gazed with gathering wrath at the havoc which Hanumān had made in his capital. He was surrounded by his nobles and ministers of state to whom he discoursed in a highly moral fashion on the different types and classes of men ; on those who depended on

[1] The pole star is called Dhruva. The constellation which Europeans call *the Great Bear* is, in the poem, styled the *Seven Rishis*. They were Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Kratu, Pulaha and Vasishtha. The wonderful story of Trishanku's elevation half way to the skies, as a result of Vishvāmitra's ascetic merit is told in Book I.

Providence, and those who ignored His will; on those who were energetic and those who sat and did nothing; on those who took good advice and those who did not; on those whose counsellors were of one opinion, and those who never got a unanimous decision, however long they might consult. All this was by way of introduction to the melancholy conclusion that Rāma was, no doubt, by this time on his way to Lankā; for he was convinced that so mighty a person would have already dried up the ocean, or at least built a bridge across the straits.

His ministers prepare for war

These cowardly sentiments did not at all meet with the approval of his hearers, who one after another reminded him of the great deeds he had accomplished in the past. He had, they said, defeated Yama, the God of death, in his own citadel beneath the ocean. He had overthrown his brother Kuvera, and captured his glorious car. He had put to flight the Dānavas as well as Vasuki the serpent king. While his son, Indrajīt had not only conquered the great god Indra, lord of the celestials, but had brought him to Lankā, a captive in his train. And did he not remember that Indra had failed to obtain his freedom until Brahmā intervened. They were sure that if Rāvana would only entrust the work of fighting to Indrajīt, Rāma and his monkey hosts would soon be overthrown. Prahasta, one of Rāvana's leading counsellors, at this stage, intervened with the statement that he was prepared to go and fight with Rāma and Lakshmana single-handed. He thought that fighting with two ordinary mortals was an easy task for one who like himself had met and conquered gods, Dānavas and Gandharvas combined. Quite a number of the Rākshasas spoke to the same effect. All of them appeared to be perfectly confident that they had nothing to fear. It was only when Rāvana's brother, Vibhishan [1] intervened that any difficulty arose.

1 The reader will remember that it was Vibhishan's intervention that saved Hanumān's life.

Both that day and on the following morning, when the demon king held another council of state,[1] Vibhishan did his best to persuade Rāvana that it was hopeless to expect that Rāma could be overthrown. He also pointed out that Rāvana had been the aggressor, from the beginning. It was true that many of the Rākshasas had been slain in Dandaka forest, but that was because they dared to make an unprovoked attack on Dasharatha's son. And now it would be an act of the highest wisdom to restore Sītā to her husband's arms and entreat Rāma to pardon the grievous sin of which they had been guilty. Vibhishan called attention of the many fearful omens they had recently witnessed.

Vibhishan urges the restoration of Sita

Ants and serpents had been seen within the temples. Cows had ceased to give milk. Mules and camels not only wept, but every hair on their bodies stood on end. Jackals, wolves and hyenas howled around the walls of the city, while the sacrificial fires refused to burn, to the great anxiety and wonder of the attendant priests. Vibhishan next enlarged on Rāma's piety and prowess. He said not one of them would escape if they did not speedily appease that great one's wrath. Neither in heaven nor in hell would they find where they could hide themselves. Rāma's shafts would follow them everywhere and cut off their heads. These varied arguments made Rāvana's counsellors exceedingly angry, and called forth insulting taunts from Indrajīt, the heir-apparent. That young man reminded his uncle of how he had taken captive the God Indra and filled the celestials 'with universal fear.' Rāvana had another brother, Kumbhakarna, who had just wakened from his usual six month's sleep. When he understood the nature of the discussion, he said that he wished Rāvana had consulted him before Sītā was brought to

[1] The poet gives another description of the wealth and splendour both within and without the palace of Rāvana. He seems to have forgotten that the city and its palaces, with the exception of Vibhishan's had been destroyed by fire. It is said that when Vibhishan entered the king's palace he 'heard sacred and holy sounds uttered by Brāhmins versed in the Vedas,' and saw these Brāhmins 'worshipped with vessels of curds, clarified butter, flowers and fried paddy'. See Dutt's translation, p. 1129.

Lankā. But seeing the deed was done, he would take part in the battle and swore that he would kill Rāma and drink his blood. This led Rāvana to tell of an incident which had happened many years before, and which he had previously never mentioned to anyone. It was to the effect that he had once fallen in love with a heavenly nymph called Punjikasthalā. He was so overcome by passion that he stripped the lady naked and ravished her. The nymph greatly distressed went to Brahmā's heaven and appealed for justice. The deity heard her prayer and uttered a curse against Rāvana that if he ever again attempted to rape any female, his head would break into an hundred pieces. And so, when he captured Sītā and she refused to yield herself to his desire, he had not dared to force her because of Brahmā's curse. It was true that in response to her appeal he had promised her a year's respite. But the real reason for the respite was that he was afraid. [1] Vibhishan made another and final attempt to convince his brother. In particular, he reflected strongly on the foolishness of allowing thoughtless boys like Indrajīt to give advice in the presence of their elders. [2] A son should try to think of his father's welfare; but he was no true son who urged his father to destruction. Instead of doing good this appeal roused Rāvana to excessive fury, and he told Vibhishan that he was a disgrace to the family, and that if he had not been his brother he would have put him to immediate death. Realizing that further argument was useless, Vibhishan rose and left the assembly. As he walked away he made the parting observation that kings would always find plenty of advisers who would tell them the things they wanted to hear. Unfortunately for them-

[1] On a previous occasion, Rāvana professed that out of his great love for Sītā, he had refrained from using force. We now understand what Sītā meant when she told Hanumān that only two months remained, and that ten had already expired.

[2] In view of the fact that he had taken captive the god Indra and filled the celestials with universal fear, Indrajīt scarcely deserved to be called a thoughtless boy. Vibhishan told him he was 'a mere child and of unripe intellect,' and hence 'not capable of ascertaining the propriety and impropriety of counsels.' Dutt's translation, p. 1141.

selves and for the advice that was offered, there were very few who were willing to give and to receive words of wisdom, however unpleasant their consequences might appear to be. But his brother was in the grasp of Fate and Death. When the sands of life were running out, men refused to listen to the warning of their dearest friends. Vibhishan did not say where he was going, but it was not to his own house. Accompanied by four other Rākshasas, he set off at once across the sea, and very soon the monkey hosts of Sugriva were gazing at them with wonder. They thought they were the vanguard of Rāvana's demon army and began to prepare themselves for war.[1]

Vibhishan deserts to Rama

Vibhishan and his four companions were of tremendous size, as big as the summit of Mount Meru. They were clothed in shining armour from head to foot, and were adorned with beautiful ornaments of various kinds. The monkey by this time had got together huge trees and great pieces of rock, and only waited the command of Sugriva to hurl them at the fiends. But Vibhishan stayed their hands by the remarkable message which he shouted down to them at the pitch of his voice. He said that his brother had insulted him and driven him out of Lankā, because he had urged the restitution of Sītā. From the time she was first brought a captive to the island he had striven to persuade his brother of his foolishness and sin. But he was like a man 'lying on the brink of death and refusing to take medicine.' Realizing that he could do no more he now came to cast himself as a suppliant at Rāma's feet. Sugriva could not refuse to carry Vibhishan's message to the prince, but he did not conceal his opinion that they were being exposed to a cunning plot on the part of the Rākshasas, who were

[1] Mr. Griffith makes the following note on this passage: 'This desertion to the enemy is somewhat abrupt, and is narrated with a brevity not usual with Valmīki. In the Bengal recension...Vibhishan is kicked from his seat by Rāvana and then after telling his mother what had happened, he flies to Mount Kailāsa, where he has an interview with Shiva, and by his advice seeks Rāma and the Vānar army.' Griffith's translation, p. 438.

trying to play the part of the owl among the crows.[1] He could not believe that Rāvana's brother would turn against him in the way he pretended to have done. He therefore advised that it would be the best and safest plan to kill Vibhishan and his four companions. Rāma listened quietly to these arguments of Sugriva, and when he was done, said he would like to hear the opinions of the other monkey leaders who were present. They were all much gratified by such condescension, and protested that it was only kindness on Rāma's part to ask such humble creatures for their advice. He was acquainted with every thing that was to be known in the three worlds. Despite their protest, however, quite a number urged their own particular views.

Vibhishan's honesty doubted

They were all unanimous in doubting Vibhishan's good intentions, with the exception of Hanumān. Strange to say he never mentioned what he had learned from Sītā, of how he had really tried to persuade Rāvana to send her back to India. Nor did he refer to the fact that Vibhishan's intervention had saved his life when Indrajit vanquished him with the Brahmā weapon. He merely said that, in his opinion, Vibhishan had come to the conclusion that Rāma was sure to be victorious over such a wicked person as his brother, and he was making his own plans before-hand. He was joining himself to the side of the stronger and in due time would be rewarded by being made Rāvana's successor on the throne. Rāma himself now intervened. He said that their first duty was to hear what Vibhishan had to say. Whether he was good or bad, honest or deceitful, he had come to them as a suppliant, and he must be heard. Some of them had suggested that the Rākshasa would never abandon his brother. But brothers were not all of one kind. They were not all so affectionate and faithful as Bharata. Others had

[1] This probably refers to an incident in the *Mahābhārata*. Ashwatthāman, one of the heroes in that epic, saw a great owl come quietly and destroy the crows that were sleeping on the branches of a tree. The incident suggested the idea of killing the Pāndu army as it lay asleep. See *Summary of Mahābhārata* p. 136.

used the language of fear, as if they should be afraid of Vibhishan. In reply to that, his answer was that he could slay every Rākshasa that the world contained, with Dānavas, Yakshas and Pisāchas included, with the tips of his fingers. But they must not ignore the cry of suppliant. They had heard of the pigeon that gave its own flesh to the cruel fowler who had killed its mate.[1] And they remembered how Kandu,[2] the ascetic, had declared that if your greatest enemy came to you in the guise of a suppliant and asked for shelter, you must not turn him away. It was a very great sin to refuse to hear the suppliant. It kept you out of heaven and deprived you of strength and courage. These wise and holy words made a great impression on Sugriva and the other monkeys. They declared that they had no further doubt as to the sincerity of Vibhishan, and requested the prince to place the converted demon on the same level of friendship as themselves. Rāma made no reply to this sudden change in the monkeys' point of view. He merely asked Sugriva to bring the Rākshasa into his presence.

The Ocean propitiated

When Sugriva called him, Vibhishan and his four companions at once descended from the air, in which they were still floating, and presented themselves, with bowed heads, before Rāma. In answer to the prince's questions, Vibhishan gave a description of the position and strength of Lankā. He also referred to the boon which his brother had received from Brahmā, with the results that gods, Gandharvas, snakes and birds were helpless before him. But Rāma assured him that Rāvana's power would soon be at an end, and that he would search in vain for a hiding place. The lowest of the seven hells, not even the shadow of the grandfather of the gods, would afford him safety. And then, as a reward for his desertion. Rāma anointed Vibhishan

[1] Rāma does not tell the story of the pigeon and the fowler. He refers to it as something well known to all. The story will be found in *Summary of the Mahābharata*, p. 161.

[2] Kandu was probably the same Kandu, referred to in the Second Book of this poem, who killed a cow in obedience to his father's command.

king of Lankā in his brother's stead. He used for the purpose water taken from the ocean, while as a token of friendship and brotherhood he took the Rākshasa in his arms and gave him a warm embrace. When these ceremonies were over, Sugriva and Hanumān asked Vibhishan's advice about crossing the straits. He at once proposed that Rāma should propitiate the Ocean. He did not think that monarch could refuse anything to a descendent of Sagara's who had himself dug out the Ocean's bed. [1] This advice commended itself to the prince, and he at once sat down on a seat of sacred grass, with his hands joined in the attitude of prayer. This he continued to do for the space of three days, and no response of any kind whatever was made by the ocean king.

The Ocean refuses to be dried up

Despite the patience which marked his character, such treatment made Rāma very angry, and he told his brother that insolent and wicked persons like the ocean treated 'calmness, forbearance, candour and soft speech' with contempt, while boastfulness and arrogance were held in honour. Apparently clemency did not pay. It was useless to show forbearance any longer. He would dry up the ocean and the monkeys would cross it dry-shod. He thereupon fitted a number of arrows to his bow and shot them into the sea. A terrible commotion was the immediate result. The sea became a heaving mass of stormy waters covered with foam. Crocodiles, sea-serpents and Dānavas, as well as others of the watery inhabitants, were greatly troubled. The waves rose as high as Mount Mandara and the Vindhya hills, while Brāhmarshis and Surarshis called out from heaven entreating the prince to hold his hand. [2] Lakshmana joined in the appeal and pointed out the great impropriety of giving way to anger.

[1] The story of Sagara is told in Book I. It was his sons who dug the ocean's bed.

[2] Brāhmarshis were rishis who lived in the sphere of Brahmā. The *Vihnu Purāna* in referring to the Prajāpatis, or rishis proper, calls them the Brāhmarshis. On the same principle, the Surarshis are the rishis attached to the gods (suras) and dwelling in their heaven. It is held that the word *sura* is allied to *swar*, 'heaven.'

But Rāma would not listen and proceeded to do what was still more extreme, for he fitted a Brahmā weapon to his bow. When he drew the string and shot the bolt, both heaven and earth shook. Darkness covered the world. And yet despite the darkness, sun, moon and stars all appeared together in the sky, while the ocean advanced beyond his usual limits to the extent of seven hundred miles. All this, however did not in the least disturb the stedfast soul of Dasharatha's son, and very soon after there rose out of the waters the Ocean himself. His eyes were like the leaves of the lotus. He had a garland of flowers on his head; his vesture was studded with gems; he wore ornaments made of gold and precious stones. He was attended by the Ganges, the Indus and other streams. Joining his hands together, he informed the prince that he was sorry he could not grant his prayer. Neither greed nor fear nor anger nor desire could make him do what Rāma wished. Earth, air, water and light acted in accordance with their essential natures. The ocean had no bottom and it could not be crossed by the monkeys in the way Rāma proposed. But if he would listen to his advice would tell him how to reach Lankā.

Nala builds a bridge across the ocean

There was in Sugriva's army a monkey called Nala. He was the son of Vishvakārma, the architect of the gods. If he would call in his aid, he was as capable as his father, and would be perfectly able to build a bridge across the sea. At this stage Nala himself intervened, and said he would be delighted to make a bridge as the ocean suggested. He added that he had thought of offering his services earlier but did not like to do so till he was asked. Rāma gratefully accepted Nala's proposal, and the work of construction was begun at once. All the monkeys appear to have been employed. They tore down mountains and uprooted trees; machinery of various kinds was employed—measuring rods and plumb lines are spoken of—with the result that within five days a bridge looking like the '*milky way in the firmament*,' joined India

and Ceylon. It was 'spacious, skilfully constructed, graceful, well paved and nicely finished.' It 'appeared like the line where the hair has been parted on the Ocean's head.' [1] Whenever the bridge was ready, the monkeys rushed across, but many of them were not content with this method of locomotion; some plunged into the sea, some mounted high into the air. When Lankā at last was reached, the gods, accompanied by a variety of other celestial beings, suddenly appeared on the scene. Each of them sprinkled the hero with holy water and hoped that he might be victorious in his fight with Rāvana, and rule the earth for evermore. [2]

Ravana's spies

Before Rāma's allies had finished the building of the bridge, a spy had been sent from Lankā to find out the numbers and strength of Sugriva's army. He had the audacity to speak to Sugriva from the air and promise great wealth and dominion if he would abandon the cause of Rāma. He was captured, however, by some monkeys who jumped up and caught him, and would have been put to death had Rāma not intervened. Whenever he reached Lankā, Rāma gave orders that he should be set free, and allowed to return to his master. This was a very wise as well as generous act on the part of the prince, for the spy was the first of many to sow doubts in Rāvana's mind. Because other spies who were sent out later, and who were captured by the monkeys to be immediately released by order of Rāma, returned to the capital and to the monarch, singing the praises of the prince, describing the wonderful bridge, and trying to enumerate the innumerable hosts that continued to pour in endless

[1] The quotations are from Mr. Dutt's translation, p. 1166.

[2] In addressing Rāma, the gods called him the human divine one. They were accompanied by Siddhas, Chāranas and Maharshis. The poet says the celestials were filled with wonder when they saw Nala's bridge. The Siddhas were a class of semi-divine beings. The Chāranas were panegyrists of the gods. The Maharshis were the great rishis, primarily seven in number, and often referred to as the Prajāpatis, or mind-born sons of Brahmā. See Note 4.

streams across the straits. [1] They were unanimously of the opinion that Rāvana should release Sītā and ask for Rāma's forgiveness.

> O king, be wise, contend no more,
> And Sitā to her lord restore.

And Rāvana's reply was always the same,

> Not if the gods, in heaven who dwell,
> Gandharvas and the fiends of hell,
> In banded opposition rise
> Against me, will I yield the prize.

And yet some impression was made upon his mind, because when the second detachment of spies returned he took them to the roof of his palace, and made them point out to him the different leaders in the army which had by that time completely encircled Lankā. Unfortunately for themselves, the spies indulged in a fresh testimony to the generosity and goodness of Rāma. And not unnaturally as they spoke of Sugriva, Hanumān, Jāmbavān, and other eminent generals, not forgetting Lakshmana, they dwelt on their strength and prowess and the hopelessness of obtaining victory. Nor did they fail to remind their master that everyone of them was the offspring of a god.[2] As was to be expected, Rāvana was filled with anger and grief and he told the spies that they were traitors to their king and country. Indeed he wondered how he had ever been able to hold the kingdom of Lankā together when he was served by such base and ungrateful cowards. They seemed to have lost all fear

[1] At an earlier stage in his poem, Valmīki speaks of millions of millions of monkeys. But one of the spies gave very much greater figures. He told Rāvana that a Koti was 10 millions, that 100,000 kotis was a Sanku, and 100,000 Sankus was Mahāsanku, and so on through seven more multiples of 100,000 till he reached a figure called *Mahangas*, and said 'well, there are kotis of Mahangas, of monkeys, in Rāma's army!'

[2] The names of at least twenty of the leaders are given, and of their divine fathers; Nila was the son of Agni Angada, the son of Indra, Hanumān of Vāyu, Nala, of Vishvakarmā, Durdhara, of Vasu, Hemakuta, of Varuna, and so on. The narrator not unnaturally adds, 'But I cannot enumerate the rest, ten kotis of heroic monkeys—all sons of deities—burning for battle' (c. 30 Dutt's ranslation, p. 1189.) No wonder Rāvana was angry.

of death, when they used such language in the presence of their master and lord, on whose lightest word their whole welfare rested. They richly deserved to die, but remembering their services in the past, he would forgive them; on one condition, however, that they never dared to enter his presence again.

When these had been driven forth and yet another contingent sent, in the hope that they would bring a more favourable report, Rāvana, in a mood akin to despair, gathered his council of state together. But he was so impatient that he did not wait for their advice. And besides, an exceedingly cunning and wicked idea had entered his mind. There was attached to his court a magician possessed of wondrous skill. He was commanded by Rāvana to fashion a human head exactly like Rāma's, covered with gore, the blood still dripping from its neck. When the head had been got ready, the demon accompanied by the magician went to the garden of Ashoka, where he found the princess, seated as before, the very picture of sorrow. In a long oration Rāvana told Sītā that there had been a great battle, in which Rāma and a large number of his followers had been killed. When he had finished his story, Rāvana bade the magician produce the bleeding head. Sītā could not but believe the testimony of her eyes. Even the jewel which Rāma was in the habit of wearing on his crest was there. Overcome with horror, she fell senseless to the ground. When she recovered consciousness, she took the head into her lap and wept aloud. Her last calamity, she said, had come. She was a widow, and no greater sorrow could befall a woman than that. She asked if all her husband's virtue and wisdom had come to this, that he should die fighting with demons, cut off in his youth. Astrologers had promised him long life, but their words were false. He had offered many sacrifices, the Agnishtoma and others, but they had been of no avail.[1] Now he was dead, gone to join his

The magic head

[1] The Agnishtoma, was a five days sacrifice 'performed by one who is desirous of obtaining heaven.' See Monier Williams.

father and other ancestors in the upper world, or shining as a star in the firmament of heaven. She then began to blame herself for being the cause of his death. Surely she must have sinned grievously in a former birth. While she was thus bewailing her loss, a warder came and took Rāvana away in obedience to an urgent summons from the generals of his army. And strange to say, whenever he left the room, the magic head disappeared from view. This made it easier for Sītā to believe the comforting words of one of her female guards. This Rākshasi, whose name was Suramā, had conceived a great love for Sītā, and she urged her not to believe that Rāma was dead. It was not possible that he should perish at the hands of demons. The head was merely a clever contrivance, the work of a clever magician. Lakshmi, the goddess of good fortune, had not forsaken her. Suramā added to her kindness by agreeing to go to the palace and find out why Rāvana had been called away so suddenly. She returned with the joyful news that the demon king had been strongly urged by his ministers of state to seek immediate peace with Rāma by the restoration of Sītā. It was true that he had refused to listen. He was like a miser who will not part with his wealth. But the end was certain and his counsellors knew it. If he did not yield, Rāvana would die, smitten by the shafts of Rāma.

Efforts for peace

It was indeed true, as the woman had said. Mālyavān, his mother's father, in particular, made a long and impressive speech, in which he dwelt on the criminal folly of keeping Sītā a prisoner. He prefaced his observations by saying that Brahmā had appointed righteousness for the celestials and unrighteousness for the Asuras, and that during the Kritayuga, righteousness had swallowed up sin, but during the Kaliyuga, unrighteousness swallowed up virtue.[1] As for Rāvana himself, it was manifest that he had set himself to the

[1] The writer of this passage must have believed that Rāma lived in the Kaliyuga or present age. See Note, 10.

destruction of piety and he was now reaping his reward, because unrighteousness was devouring him. Holy persons everywhere were angry with him. They were offering sacrifices and repeating the Vedas to this end that he might be destroyed. The smoke of the Agnihotra was enveloping the Rākshasas and taking away their energy. There were, too, a great many omens happening in Lankā, and all of them portending evil. Cows were giving birth to mice and leopards. Swine were pairing with dogs, and cats with leopards. It was true that by the bounty of Brahmā he was secure from gods and Dānavas and Yakshas, but he was now called upon to fight with men and monkeys and bears. As for Rāma of whom he spoke so contemptuously, he held him to be the god Vishnu who had assumed the form of a man. It was no human being who could have built such a wonderful bridge. He ended his appeal, as so many others had done, by urging overtures for an immediate peace. Rāvana was roused to unparalleled anger by this speech of his grandfather's. He said he had never listened to anything like it before. Did he mean to say that this solitary and feeble man, attended by monkeys, a refugee, driven to the woods by his father, was he saying that such an insignificant person was *his* equal; the equal of Rāvana the lord of the Rākshasas and the terror of the gods? He supposed that he must be saying all these insulting things to spur him on. Better to be torn to pieces than to yield to such foolish and cowardly advice. Mālyavān made no reply to this scornful answer. He merely asked permission to depart, and went to his own house. When his grandfather had gone, Rāvana made a fresh disposal of his forces for the defence of the capital. For himself he chose command of the army which was posted at the northern gate.

Rama besieges Lanka

The scene now changes to the army of Rāma which was actively preparing for the complete investment of Lankā. By a wise precaution Vibhishan had already sent his four Rākshasa followers who had escaped with him from Lankā, to study the preparations on the side of

the enemy. They went in the form of birds and were able to report all that Rāvana had planned and how his troops and generals were placed. This was of great help to Rāma who chose for himself command of the monkeys who were assaulting the northern gate of the city, when he learned that the demon king was there on guard. Knowing that the monkeys were able to assume any shape they chose, Rāma issued a strict order that none of them should go in human guise with the exception of Vibhishan and his four followers. To add to his own knowledge, Rāma climbed to the top of a neighbouring mountain, from which he was able to view the situation for himself. There also he and the leading monkeys spent the night. It was his intention to begin the attack on the following morning.

Sugriva attacks Ravana

The army awoke with the coming of the dawn. By this time the city of Lankā was so closely invested that the wind had difficulty in finding an entrance. Before the battle could begin Sugriva rather complicated the situation by making a sudden attack on Rāvana. The demon was standing on the roof of his palace when Sugriva rushed at him and a most exciting duel took place.[1] It was largely a wrestling match. But they tore at one another with their nails and teeth ; they fell both together from the palace roof into the moat ; their bodies were covered with the blood and sweat, and the issue of the contest seemed very doubtful indeed. Eventually Sugriva noticed that Rāvana was about to make use of his powers of illusion. This would have been highly dangerous for the monkey. So realizing that discretion was the better part of valour, he made a sudden leap into the air and rejoined his friends who were still standing on the mountain

[1] Both the combatants addressed one another, Rāvana making a pun at Sugriva's expense. *Sugriva* means *good necked*, so he said, 'Thou wert Sugriva (good-necked), in my absence—but now thou shalt be *Hinagriva*, neckless or without a neck.' See Mr. Dutt's translation, from which I quote p. 1212.

top. Rāma gravely reproved Sugriva for acting so rashly. It was not wise, he said, for kings to endanger their lives in such a free fashion, and asked him what they would have done had he been killed. It would have availed little to set the life of Sītā or of Bharata or Lakshmana against such a great calamity. Sugriva found it difficult to give a satisfactory excuse. He said that he could not help himself. The sight of Rāvana, the ravisher of Sītā was more than he could stand. The battle now seemed about to begin.

Rama offers peace to Ravana

But another pause took place. Turning to Angada Rāma told him that he was to go as an ambassador to Rāvana. It was desirable to avoid as far as possible the effusion of blood. He was to tell the demon that peace would be restored if he would send back Sītā, and ask for forgiveness. If he refused and listened instead to the advice of his foolish counsellors, he would undoubtedly perish and his kingdom would be conferred on his brother Vibhishan. To this conciliatory message Rāma added a strange statement. It was that if Rāvana, were killed in battle, he would go to heaven and attain to the state of the celestials and the great Rishis.[1] When Angada announced these terms to Rāvana, the demon without giving them the least consideration ordered four of his guard to seize the ambassador. But Angada was prepared. He allowed himself to be caught, but clutching in turn the four demons to his breast, he sprang with them high into the air. When he had reached a great height he let them drop and they fell dead to the ground. Before rejoining his friends Angada did more damage. He gave a kick to one of the principal turrets of the palace, with the result that it fell upon the spacious

[1] The words in Mr. Dutt's translation are as follows: 'On being slain with my shafts, thou shalt attain peace, which the translator explains as *attain heaven*. And also 'O Rākshasa, thou shalt, remaining steady in fight, attain the state of celestials and Maharshis and Rājarshis.' p. 1219. We have already seen that death at Rāma's hands was a great honour. Another idea was that heroes who died in battle went to heaven.

building beneath and left it a ruin. This incident made a bigger impression on Rāvana than anything that had previously occurred. He looked upon it as a very bad omen, the presage of disaster and death. He did not allow it, however, to damp the ardour of his followers, who at every gate, were by this time engaged in fierce battle with their foes.

The battle begins

No purpose would be served by giving details of the battle. The poet tells with endless repetition, of single combats that took place between the leaders of the rival hosts; of how the monkeys filled up the moat with dust and crags, straw and wood; of golden gateways broken down; of kettle drums 'sounded by means of golden sticks,' of the many thousands of conches and trumpets and the awful noise they made. And of course he adds that the contest could only be compared to the ancient battle between the Asuras and the gods. The Rākshasas wore armour and made use of iron weapons, but the only weapons of the monkeys in addition to their teeth and nails, were rocks and trees.[1] The battle, which had begun at sunrise, raged right through the night. In the exceeding darkness the only illumination which the combatants had was the light which shone from Rāma's arrows and which resembled tongues of fire.

Rama and Lakshmana in a swoon

But unfortunately a calamity of the first order happened before morning. Sugriva had discomfited Indrajīt, slain his charioteer and horses, and forced him to abandon his car. This defeat, which was applauded by the gods and other celestials, filled Indrajīt with shame and anger. Realizing that he could not conquer by fighting in a straightforward

1 'Great and fierce was the engagement that took place between the heroic Rākshasas and monkeys burning for victory, capable of making people's hair stand on end. And from the persons of the Rākshasas and the monkeys there flowed a river of gore, having hair for grass (growing on its banks) and the bodies of the warriors for pieces of plank floating (adown the current).' Dutt's translation, p. 1226.

fashion, he took refuge in deceit. He had received from Brāhmā, as a boon, the power to make himself invisible and to discharge terrific arrows 'consisting of serpents.' These arrows he shot at Rāma and Lakshmana, making himself invisible all the while, and rendered both the heroes insensible.[1] It is said that he covered their bodies with his serpent shafts and that the blood gushed from their wounds in torrents. When he had achieved this wicked deed, Indrajīt shot up into the air, shouting out as he did so, that even Indra could do nothing against him when he chose to make himself invisible. Indrajīt did not confine himself to disabling Rāma and Lakshmana; he attacked and wounded Hanumān, Angada and Jāmbavan in addition to killing countless others. Sugriva and Vibhishan had been summoned to the place where the two heroes lay. The former was greatly distressed, believing that both the brothers were really dead. But Vibhishan, being a Rākshasa, had grasped the situation. He knew his nephew's power and how he had obtained it. He therefore told Sugriva not to grieve. The brothers were not dead. They were merely in a state of stupor which would gradually pass away. As he said this Vibhishan took some water and washed Sugriva's eyes. When his eyes were opened the monkey king saw things as they really were, and that they must have patience till Rāma and Lakshmana were restored to consciousness.

Sita views her husband's body

Indrajīt hastened to Rāvana's presence and told his father of his great achievement. The Rākshasa king was overcome with delight, took his son in his arms and kissed his head. His first thought was to send messengers to Sītā and tell her that both Rāma and

[1] It is difficult to tell what happened. It is said that they were *stupified*; that they were *bound* by means of the shaft; that they were wounded with arrows up to the foreparts of their hands, and that there was not an unwounded portion that could be measured by a finger. It is said that Sugriva thought them dead, and yet Lakshmana wept, seeing his brother's condition. It may be that the state of unconsciousness increased gradually, because it is said that 'the heroes, pained and suffering terribly, lay down as became heroes.'

Lakshmana were dead. He was confident, he said, that with all other resource cut off, she would turn her thoughts in his direction. The messengers were bidden to take the princess to the battlefield in his famous car, Pushpaka, of which we have already heard. When Sītā reached the place where the bodies of Rāma and Lakshmana were lying, it is said that she broke out into bitter lamentation. But the major part of her lament was a very calm statement about a promise that a soothsayer had made to her years before. The soothsayer had said that she would be the mother of sons and never be a widow. She also dwelt at length on the auspicious marks to be found on her body, all confirmatory of the opinion of the soothsayer.[1] When, however, she began to speak of Kausalya's grief, an old Rākshasi called Trijatā, who had befriended her on a previous occasion and now accompanied her to the field of battle, intervened with the observation that the monkeys keeping guard over the bodies did not look at all distressed. From this she concluded that they were not really dead. She had also noticed that their faces were not the faces of dead men. She therefore advised her not to grieve as she was convinced that they had only been rendered unconscious by the exercise of some spell. Sitā joined her hands together and uttered the hope that it might be indeed so. She then got into the car and returned to Lankā, but her mind was still burdened with apprehension and grief.[2]

[1] Some of the auspicious marks were: 'my eyebrows touch each other; my hips are devoid of down and round; and my teeth are close. My temples and eyes, hands, feet, ankles and things are equal, and my fingers are furnished with round nails, and are plump and even in the middle. And my breasts are close and firm and developed, and have their nipples sunk.' Dutt's translation, p. 1241. These with many others were, in the opinion of the Brāhmins skilled in fortune-telling, proofs that she would be 'installed in the kingdom in company with her husband.'

[2] The ordinary reader wonders why Sītā did not remain where she was, and find out if her husband was really dead. The poem does not indicate that she had given any sort of promise to return to her prison-house in Lankā.

Garuda restores the princes the health

Very soon after Sītā's departure, Rāma awoke from his swoon[1] and seeing his brother lying apparently dead on the ground, gave way to an outburst of uncontrolled sorrow. Indeed he told Sugriva and others who were present, to return at once to India. If Lakshmana were dead it was no use to fight further. One might get a wife the equal of Sītā but there never had been and never would be, a brother the equal of Lakshmana. He could not face Bharata and Shatrughna, he could not face their mothers, if he went back alone. It was better that he should die where he was. At this stage Rāma must have become unconscious once more. Because we read that Vibhishan returned to the place where the heroes were lying, and began to speak of them as if they were both dead. Shortly before, as the reader will remember, he had assured Sugriva that they were not dead. Now he says that they are and that he must abandon all hope of succeeding to his brother's throne. And it is Sugriva who now performs the part of comforter and tells him that all will be well. They will both quickly recover he says, because they are under the care of Garuda, the king of birds. He then went on to propose that some of his followers should convey Rāma and Lakshmana to Kishkindhā, while he and the others should continue the siege of Lankā and achieve the restoration of Sītā. But Surasena one of the monkey leaders proposed a still better plan. He knew of a most wonderful medicine which the gods made and used for their own benefit. Indeed he had seen the gods employ it with miraculous effect, when they were wounded in their battles with the Asuras. He knew where it was, on the mountains Chandra and Drona, in the sea of milk; the place where they got the amrita, at the churning of the Ocean. It was powerful enough to raise the dead. He proposed that Hanumān should go and get it. Happily it was not necessary to

[1] His awaking was due to the 'exceeding toughness of his person,' says Mr. Dutt's translation.

send Hanumān so far. For just at that moment, Garuda, the king of birds, appeared,[1] with no other object in view than the restoration of the two brothers to health and vigour. This he did by rubbing their faces with his hands. An instantaneous change took place. Every wound was healed. Their bodies became cool and shining. They took on a most 'excellent complexion.' And they had twice the strength of body and mind that they had before. Rāma apparently did not know his benefactor, because when he sat up and looked about him, he asked Garuda who he was. Garuda merely replied that there was not a god in heaven who could have cured them, or delivered them from the bonds of the serpent arrows. But he expressed the hope that Rāma would not be too curious in asking questions at present. He would find out the explanation later when he had achieved success in battle. As to that there was no doubt. He would recover Sītā, and there would be nobody left alive in Lankā, excepting old people and children. He added a word of caution however. They must always be on the watch when fighting with demons. They were full of deceit and warriors who 'cherished affection for their foes,' as Rāma did, should be more careful. Having made these observations he asked permission to depart, and in a moment had disappeared from view.

Great defeat of the demons

When Rāma and Lakshmana were in this state of swoon from which they recovered by the kind intervention of Garuda, the monkeys had become very demoralized. They started and ran whenever they saw a Rākshasa. Indeed, when their friend Vibhishan

[1] Garuda, the king of birds, was the enemy of the serpent race, whom he destroyed in great numbers. Hence his readiness to destroy the power which they had obtained over Rāma and Lakshmana. But there was, of course, another reason, why he wished to help his friend, as he called him, 'My friend, Rāghva.' Garuda was the vehicle on which the god Vishnu rode, and Rāma was an incarnation of Vishnu. Garuda's mother, Vinatā, and her sister Kadru, were daughters of Daksha, the Prajāpati, who gave them in marriage to the rishi Kashyapa. These two sisters hated one another bitterly and the enmity descended to their children. Garuda had one brother, Atru, but his aunt gave birth to 1000 eggs from which serpents were born, the ancestors of the serpent race. See *Summary of Mahābhārata*. pp. 25,27, 140, 237.

appeared at the place where the princes were lying, the whole army took to its heels and fled. Their joy was all the greater when the princes were restored to more than their usual vigour, and the battle was renewed with more vehemence than before. Their joyful shouting filled the mind of Rāvana with apprehension, and the apprehension was increased when demons, pale with terror, came and told him that Rāma and Lakshmana had recovered from their swoon. The demon king realized that he was now in a position of the greatest peril. He sent out army after army, under the leadership of his most distinguished generals. But one after another these eminent persons were defeated and slain. Hanumān himself killed two of them. His favourite weapon was a mountain peak, which he uprooted from the ground and dropped on his foe. Nīla smote another with a tree. But Angada used a sword, the only sword mentioned as being in the possession of any monkey. Though the demons had a great variety of weapons, maces, swords bows and arrows, they did not refuse to engage in wrestling and boxing matches, while the combatants gave one another great slaps and blows, that had the force and destructive power of a thunderbolt. Shouting, too, was an effective weapon. Rāvana told Prahasta that the fickle-minded monkeys could not endure the noise he made. They feared it as much as an elephant feared the lion's roar.

Ravana himself takes part

These successive defeats made Rāvana conclude that the time had come for his own intervention in the battle, and he issued forth from the northern gate of the city, accompanied by a great army of demons. As he advanced Vibhishan pointed out his principal supporters. Rāma was greatly impressed with the grandeur and magnificance of the demon king. He said that he equalled the sun in brilliance. It was impossible for any one to look at him.[1] The two leaders did not engage with one another at once. First of all, Sugriva

[1] 'He is incapable of being gazed at like the sun himself.' Dutt, p. 1277.

sprang to the front. He tore up a mountain peak and hurled it at Rāvana. But the demon with his arrows cut the mountain in two, and it fell to the ground. Very soon another arrow laid the monkey beside the shattered mountain, where he rolled about, shrieking with pain. No less than six of Sugriva's generals came to the rescue, but Rāvana put them all to flight. With their bodies covered with arrows—they looked like hills covered with trees—they took refuge at Rāma's feet.

Ravana and Lakshmana fight

By this time Rāma had lifted his bow and was about to issue forth. But Lakshmana asked permission to tackle the demon first. Rāma graciously consented though he reminded his brother that he would need to be very careful. However, Lakshmana also had to stand aside, because Hanumān appeared on the scene. He told the demon that though gods and devils could not slay him, a monkey would. They did not, however, give one another anything more serious than very vigorous and very powerful slaps and blows, but eventually Rāvana gave Hanumān one straight on the chest, which rendered him *hors de combat*. Nīla, the son of Agni, next stepped forward, armed with a mountain peak. This peak Rāvana shivered to pieces with seven arrows, much to Nīla's amazement and anger. This monkey was particularly agile and he began to play with tricks with Rāvana. Reducing his size greatly he jumped about Rāvana's chariot. At one moment he was standing on his bow, at another moment on his banner. He had the audacity even to sit on the crest of Rāvana's tiara. The Rākshasa was greatly bewildered, while Rāma and the monkeys were filled with astonishment and joy. Despite his agitation Rāvana succeeded in fitting a fiery shaft to his bow and smote the monkey so vigorously that he fell to the ground. But Nīla was the son of the god Agni, and because of this, as well as of the great strength he possessed, Nīla did not die. Lakshmana's opportunity had now come. The usual high-sounding taunts were exchanged on

each side. They each discharged innumerable arrows, but both were able to render the shafts of their opponents useless. Despite that fact their bodies were covered with arrows, their wounds bled profusely and they retained consciousness with the greatest difficulty. In the end Rāvana made use of an arrow and of a dart which had been given to him by the god Brahmā, and one would have expected that the battle would have ended in victory for the demon, but for reasons that are not explained Rāvana suddenly seized Lakshmana round the waist and tried to lift him from the ground. But the demon 'who could with his arms wield Himavān or Mandara or Meru, or the triple world itself along with the immortals, could not, for all his strength, lift up Bharata's younger brother.'[1] It is said that this was due to the fact that Lakshmana 'remembered that he was verily a portion of Vishnu himself.'[2] Be that as it may Hanumān stepped forward and gave Rāvana such a blow on the chest that the demon collapsed with his knees on the ground, while blood gushed out in streams from his mouths and eyes and arms. With the utmost difficulty he staggered to his car, where he sat down in a faint. Gods and monkeys, saints and Asuras raised a great shout of joy, while Hanumān lifted Lakshmana in his arms and carried him to Rāma. He who could not be moved by his foe was as light as a feather in the arms of friendship. Another very strange thing happened. The dart of Brahmā left the body of Lakshmana and returned to Rāvana's quiver, while the prince was completely healed of his wounds by remembering that he was a part of Vishnu.

By this time Rāvana must have recovered consciousness, for we are told that Rāma rushed at him.

Rama and Ravana fight

Once more Hanumān intervened. This time it was to ask Rāma to get on to his back. He said that Vishnu always rode on Garuda and Rāma must ride on Hanumān.

1 Dutt's translation, quoted, p. 1284.

2 Dutt's translation, quoted, p. 1284. The same phrase recurs at p. 1285.

The prince agreed and thus mounted was at long last ready for the fray. It was not a long engagement. Rāma slew Rāvana's charioteer, killed his horses, and destroyed the car with its banner and white umbrella.[1] But after wounding the demon severely, he recognized that he had had a long and exhausting day, and knew that he must be very tired. He therefore told him to go home to Lankā and come back and fight with him the following day. This was a great humiliation for Rāvana, but he obeyed and hurried off to Lankā as quickly as he could. His pride was humbled in the dust. The thunderbolts of heaven had left him unshaken and unafraid. Now he was compelled to flee from the wrath and power of a mortal.

Kumbhakarna described

Rāvana returned to his palace, burning with rage and humiliation. Seated on his golden throne, he told his counsellors that he had indeed lost the fruit of all his ascetic toil. He, who had conquered the gods, was now defeated by a mortal. But alas! he remembered, when too late, what Brahmā had told him. It was that he had asked for and received immunity from gods and demons. He had not asked for immunity from men, and the god had added that it was a man he would have cause to fear. And so it had come to pass. The words of the god were true. He had cause to fear Ramā, son of Dasharatha, who had given him his life on the field of battle, because he was too tired to fight any longer.[2] He felt there was no hope of victory left, unless they could by some means or other waken his brother, Kumbhakarna. This brother was in the habit of sleeping for six or eight months at a

1 The white umbrella, to which reference is so often made was the sign of sovereignty.

2 Rāvana also recalled, when it was too late, that he had once laughed at Shiva's chief attendant, Nandishwara, who was in the form of a monkey. Nandishwara was angry, and with a curse said he would be destroyed by monkeys. He also remembered other curses uttered against him, including one uttered by an ancestor of Rāma, to the effect that one of his descendants would slay him along with his sons and followers in battle. He also suggested that Sītā was an incarnation of the nymph he had outraged (see previous pages) now seeking to revenge her wrongs, We have amplifications or repetitions of these curses in the seventh book.

time, and when he did waken, he fell asleep again within the space of twenty-four hours. This excessive drowsiness was due to a curse which had been pronounced against the Rākshasa by the god Brahmā. It appears that Kumbhakarna was the strongest of all Rāvana's brothers. The others had obtained their strength as the result of asceticism, but he was mighty from his birth. For instance, the day after he was born he ate up countless helpless creatures. Their relatives and others, fearing they would be involved in a similar calamity, appealed to the god Indra. But when the god threw a thunderbolt at Kumbhakarna, the Rākshasa retaliated by tearing out one of Airavata's[1] tusks and using it as a weapon against the god. Indra received such a blow on the chest that his body was covered with blood. Such an insult was too much to be borne, and the wounded god, accompanied by his fellow deities, Brahmarshis and Dānavas, went to Brahmā to complain. In their statement of protest they said Kumbhakarna had been destroying the asylums of ascetics and outraging other men's wives. They also pointed out that if the Rakshasa went on consuming creatures at the rate he was doing, there would soon be no living thing left in the world. Brahmā, who is, in this narrative, called, both the Prajāpati and the Grandfather, by the use of certain sacred texts caused Kumbhakarna to appear before him. When he saw the fiend, however, the god was filled with fear. But he had sufficient control over his feelings to utter a most effective curse. From that day, because of this curse, Kumbhakarna would lie down as one dead. And in the sight of all beholders the curse had an immediate effect. The huge Rākshasa, as big as a mountain, sank helpless to the earth. Unfortunately Rāvana had come with his brother and he told Brahmā that it was very wrong of him to curse his own grandson.[2]

[1] Airavata was the elephant on which Indra rode.

[2] Kumbhakarna and Rāvana were really great-grandsons of Brahmā. Their grandfather, Pulastya, was one of the six mind-born sons of Brahmā. Pulastya was the ancestor of demons and monkeys. See Note 4. Vibhishan told Rāma this wonderful story somewhat later in the poem, but it seemed better to introduce it here.

It was true that a curse never failed in its effects, but it was possible to soften it somewhat. In response to this appeal, Brahmā agreed that Kumbhakarna would sleep for six months, and at the end of that time remain awake for a single day. When he did awake he was always frightfully hungry and ranged the earth with wide open mouth, 'devouring people like a fire.'

The awakening of Kumbhakarna

It was on Kumbhakarna, then, that Rāvana now centred his hope. If his brother could only be roused, it might be possible to defeat and slay their foes. The demon king therefore sent a large body of soldiers to the cave where his brother was sleeping, with the command to do everything in their power to break his slumbers. They took with them the carcases of deer, buffaloes and other animals in thousands, with huge quantities of rice, and vessels full of wine. The mouth of the cave was seven miles wide. Its floor was paved with gold and gems. There were at least ten thousand Rākahasas engaged in the task of wakening Rāvana's brother, and yet, at the very start, they were met with a difficulty. The expulsion of breath from his nostrils raised such a tempest that it required the combined effort of the army to stand their ground and enter the cave. And when they did get in, what an undertaking it was! They beat kettle-drums, they blew trumpets and shells. They struck him with maces, with trees, with mountain peaks even, and it was no use. They poured into his ears the contents of a thousand vessels of water. They cut off his hair; they bit his ears. Eventually they made a thousand elephants charge over his body. That seemed to make an impression, for he sat up and yawned. When he yawned, the great cavern he revealed looked like the mouth of hell, while his eyes shone like the stars. Without saying a word, the watching demons pointed to the mountains of flesh and rice, which the fiend began to devour with amazing velocity. They seem, also, to have brought blood for him to drink. For it is said that he drank 'vessels full of fat and blood.' Kumbhakarna was very angry at

being wakened, but the food he consumed and the appeal for help, which was made to him by one of Rāvana's ministers, had a mollifying influence. He said he would go at once, at least after he had washed his face and had a bath,[1] and not only kill Rāma and the monkeys, but eat their flesh and drink their blood.

Kumbhakarna says he will kill Rama

As Kumbhakarna strode through the streets of Lankā to his brother's palace, the citizens showered flowers on him, from the windows of their houses. They were confident that he would help them in their evil plight. When he met his brother and heard his story, he reminded him that he had advised him previously of his folly,[2] and now when he was experiencing the bitter fruits of his evil deeds, he was crying out for assistance. Indeed, Kumbhakarna read his brother a very long lecture on his rash conduct, which Rāvana not unnaturally interrupted by a request to know what he was prepared to do. It was too late now to speak of past blunders. The true friend was the man who helped you in a difficulty, yes, even when you have wandered from the paths of righteousness.[3] To these sentiments Kumbhakarna said he gave his cordial assent. He had said what was in his mind, but he had no intention of leaving his brother in the lurch. He would go forth at once and fight with Rāma. Nor did he care how many gods came to Rāma's help. He would put every one of them to flight. One of Rāvana's ministers had the courage to tell the giant he was boasting, and talking like a boy.

1 When the bath was over, Kumbhakarna, feeling greatly refreshed, drank two thousand vessels of wine.

2 This was at Rāvana's first conference with his ministers when it is said that Kumbhakarna had just awakened from a six months' sleep.

3 In view of Kumbhakarna's very bad character, one does not expect to read such pious and highly moral observations. 'Even as a sinner reapeth perdition, verily hath the fruit of thine unrighteous act found thee . . . He that doeth last what should be done first, and first what should be done last, is ignorant of what is prudence and what not . . . Not understanding the sense of the scriptures, persons possessed of beastly intelligence . . . are inspired with a desire of speaking out of sheer volubility . . . and so on. One feels that Kumbhakarna himself was inspired with a good deal of volubility. See Dutt's translation, p. 1300 from which I quote.

It was not so easy as he thought to kill Dasharatha's son. There was no one who could hope to fight on equal terms with one who was as terrible as the god of Death. He therefore recommended that they should spread the news that Rāma and Lakshmana were dead, killed in battle, and their flesh devoured. When Sītā heard of this calamity, and when her heart was tender, Rāvana would be able to capture her affection for himself. Such advice had been already given to the demon king. It had been acted on and found to be of no avail. On this occasion it was scornfully rejected by both brothers as a cowardly proposal, and Kumbhakarna prepared for battle.

Kumbhakarna puts the monkeys to flight

The advent of this great and unexpected ally filled the Rākshasas with such joy that their shout of triumph made 'the very sea shake.' And yet they had warning of impending doom in the many fearful omens which showed on every side, to all of which, however, neither Kumbhakarna nor his supporters paid any heed. When the monkeys saw the immense giant jump over the walls and come in their direction, they fled before him, like 'clouds driven by the wind.' Some of them, indeed, were well across the bridge on their way back to India before Angada succeeded in bringing them back to some sort of discipline. It was not, however, with the rank and file, that Kumbhakarna desired to fight, though it is said that he crushed many thousands of them to death with his mace, while he seized as many more and tossed them into his mouth, ten or twenty at a time. Happily, the monster was built on such a huge scale that quite a number of the monkeys were able to escape by his nose and ears.[1] Hanumān was the first to offer him any real resistance. This he did from the air, dropping mountain peaks and trees on the top of the demon. Unfortunately Kumbhakarna had the power, which has been noticed in others, of rendering useless the weapons of his opponents, by

[1] He was like Garuda, says the poet, swallowing up serpents. Dutt's translation, p. 1314.

shooting weapons of his own. And the poet says in this connexion, 'all these mountain tops, he cut off with his dart.' Hanumān eventually had to quit the field, completely overpowered by a blow on the chest, vomiting blood and roaring like thunder. Nīla, Angada, and Sugriva were, also, one after the other put out of action. The last-named did Kumbhakarna a great deal of damage which should not pass without mention. When Sugriva fell senseless to the ground, Kumbhakarna picked him up and carried him off to Lankā. Nothing is said as to what he intended to do with him. But in any case, Sugriva recovered from his swoon and realizing that he was in the giant's arms, resolved on revenge. We are told that he 'cut off the ears and nose of that enemy of the gods, and split both his sides with the blow of his feet.' Overcome with pain and anger, Kumbhakarna cast Sugriva on the ground, intending to crush him to death. But the monkey was too quick. He sprang into the air beyond the giant's reach and very soon was standing at Rāma's side.

Rama slays Kumbhakarna

Kumbhakarna naturally returned to the field of battle. But he was a horrible sight, with nose and ears cut off and his body covered with blood. He wrought as much devastation as before, among the monkeys, though in his anger he devoured a great number of his own friends by mistake. He was now met by Lakshmana. But after they had fought together for some little time, the giant said he wanted to fight with Rāma. It is only fair to add that he complimented Lakshmana on his prowess. It was a great honour to have fought with and withstood one who had successfully opposed the king of the celestials and the god of death. It was, however, a waste of time to fight with any body except Rāma. When Rāma was slain, all were slain.[1] It was soon shown, however, that he was seeking to slay the unslayable. The first shafts, with which Rāma smote the fiend, caused fire

[1] See Dutt's translation, p. 1322.

and smoke to come out of his mouth, while he got such a shock, that every weapon he had fell from his nerveless hands to the ground. Deprived of these, Kumbhakarna tore up a mountain and hurled it at the prince. But Rāma shot seven arrows in quick succession and they not only arrested its progress, but cut it in two. The hero next made use of supernatural weapons. With the first of these, a Vāyu weapon, he cut off Kumbhakarna's right arm. Apparently by this time, the giant had recovered his mace, for we are told that arm and mace flew up into the air. When they fell, they fell on the armies of the monkey king and crushed them to death.[1] The survivors, and there appear to have been some, wounded and heart-broken, watched with breathless interest, the issue of the combat. And they had not long to wait. The second arm and then the two legs of the giant were quickly severed. In their fall also, a great deal of damage was done in destroying trees and rocks, monkeys and demons. Kumbhakarna was now reduced to his head and trunk. But even then, in a way which is not explained, he was able to run in the direction of the prince which he did with wide open jaws, hoping to swallow him up. But Rāma filled his mouth with arrows and rendered him speechless. This was too much for the giant and he fell senseless to the earth. One more task remained and that was to cut off the demon's head. For this purpose a Brahmā weapon was necessary. It was as swift as the wind, as brilliant as the Sun, like Death himself. As it flashed from Rāma's hands, it filled the whole earth with its glory. When the head fell from the mountainous trunk, it brought down in ruin many of the buildings and walls of Lankā. The body itself for reasons which are not explained plunged into the sea, where its descent into the depths of the ocean caused the death of many huge 'fishes and serpents.'

[1] The death of the whole monkey host, thus indirectly caused by Rāma himself, compels the translator in Mr. Dutt's work to observe, 'This, of course, is not to be taken literally,' an observation one may add, which could be made not unfrequently, throughout the poem.

When news of this great catastrophe reached the ears of Rāvana, he fell down in a faint, while his surviving sons and brothers began to weep. On regaining consciousness he declared that he had no desire to live longer. But his sons told him not to give way to useless sorrow, nor to speak like a coward. He had in his possession the invincible dart of Brahmā, his coat of mail and his car, which was drawn by one thousand asses. He had fought with and conquered gods and Dānavas. Why should he be afraid? But they did not ask their father to go out himself. They said they would go and bring back victory themselves. Not less than five of Rāvana's sons thereupon issued forth from Lankā attended by large armies. But their boastings were in vain, because one after the other they were all slain.[1]

Ravana's sons slain

It would appear that when these heroes went out to battle, their brother Indrajīt was not present. At least, when Rāvana heard of the death of his sons and was speaking as if he were now entirely alone, Indrajīt appeared and told his father not to weep because, as he boastfully expressed it, 'Indrajīt yet breathes.' The prince at once mounted his car which was supplied with every kind of weapon, and soon arrived at the field of conflict. With regard to the army of demons which attended him, some of them rode on elephants and lions, others on crows and peacocks. Surrounded by his forces, Indrajīt proceeded to offer libations to the god of fire. This offering was accompanied by fragrant wreaths and fried paddy, while choice mantras were recited, and the prince 'seized the neck of a living goat.'[2] The god of fire was so gratified with the offering that he appeared in person to receive it. Indrajīt next acquired a weapon from the god Brahmā, though it is

Rama and Lakshmana stupefied a second time

[1] The reader will probably be grateful for the omission of what these sons of Rāvana did, and of how they were slain. The story of Indrajīt's fight occupies about fifty pages in Mr. Dtt's translation.

[2] It is not said what was done with the goat. Presumbly it was sacrificed.

not explained how he got it, and consecrated his bow and car with sacred texts. As a result of this sacrifice and invocation the whole world, with sun and stars, was filled with fear, presumably because it dreaded the result. It will be remembered that Indrajīt had also obtained from Brahmā the power to render himself invisible. This very serious handicap for his opponents, he at once proceeded to make use of. For he disappeared from view and began to pour forth torrents of arrows at the bears and monkeys. In particular he made use of the Brahmā weapon, by means of which he either killed or rendered 'almost lifeless' Sugriva, Angada, Jāmbavān and many others of the most distinguished among Rāma's supporters. How this was done is not explained. But the poet goes on to tell, in a most mysterious manner, that Rāma and Lakshmana were also made incapable of action. Rāma complained gently to Lakshmana that the ways of Brahmā were incomprehensible, but that they must calmly submit to what was inevitable. Indrajīt had got this power from Brahmā, and the best thing they could do was to lie down where they were.[1] When Indrajīt saw Rāma and Lakshmana lying helpless on the ground, he went back to Lankā and told his father of all the wonderful things that he had done.

Rama and Lakshmana restored

Vibhishan and Hanumān would appear to have been the only supporters of Rāma who escaped the power and the stupefying effects of the Brahmā weapon. And as they walked over the field of battle searching for survivors, they counted not less than six hundred and seventy million dead bodies, all slain apparently by the dart of Brahmā. In the search they came across what they thought was the dead body of

[1] In a later canto Vibhishan says that the princes were in this plight, because they showed reverence unto the words of the Self-sprung one (Brahmā) The god had given to this weapon 'unfailing power' and 'the king's sons are doing honour to it by lying down on the field of battle.' See Dutt's translation, p. 1359. This is of course the second time that Indrajīt had rendered his opponents either insensible or incapable of action. There are not a few such repetitions in this book, which may be considered as interpolations, added at different times to the original work.

Jāmbavān the king of the bears. To their delight, however, they found that Jāmbavān still breathed. The aged bear asked anxiously if Hanumān was still alive, because, as he said, all their hopes were now centred in him. He then explained what he meant. He wished Hanumān to go at once to a certain mountain in the Himālayas, and bring back four medicinal herbs which grew there. Even to smell these herbs was enough. It would restore to life and vigour not only Rāma and Lakshmana, but the whole army of bears and monkeys. Hanumān at once obeyed and in the very briefest time was among the Himālayas searching for the plants. These herbs, however, knew that Hanumān was coming and tried to hide themselves. Indeed they made themselves invisible, a most ungenerous and unfriendly act which roused the anger of the wind god's son. But Hanumān was more than a match for them. He uprooted the mountain on which the plants were growing and carried it off with trees and elephants still on it, just as they were. When he got back to Lankā he held the mountain and the herbs to the nostrils of Rāma and Lakshmana who at once sat up, healed of all their wounds. An equally instantaneous effect was produced in the case of the bears and the monkeys; indeed every one who had been killed in battle was restored to life. Lest anyone should imagine that the Rākshasas shared in the boon, the poet explains that whenever a demon was killed in battle his friends had thrown the dead body into the sea. Having achieved this great purpose, Hanumān took the mountain with the herbs and restored it to its place among the Himālayas.

Rama is told that Sita is dead

The battle was now renewed with unprecedented vigor. In particular the monkeys made a night attack on Lankā, setting the whole city on fire. The cries of terrified women, as they fled from the burning buildings, and the triumphant shouts of the monkeys made the ten cardinal points, the ocean and the earth resound. But that was nothing to the sound made by the

twanging of Rāma's bow. At this point Rāvana found it necessary to order Indrajīt to take the field once more. And once more also, we find him making offerings to the god of fire and obtaining therefrom omens of victory. On this occasion Indrajīt not only was able to make himself invisible; he was able to render his bow inaudible so that no one could tell where he was. Rāma and Lakshmana were soon covered with arrows, and all they could do was to shoot in the direction from which the arrows came. Another device employed by Indrajīt was the fashioning of a magic figure exactly like that of Sītā. This he brought with him in his car and, in the sight of the whole monkey army, proceeded to slay her. Rāma and Lakshmana were not present—why, it is not explained—but Hanumān was and he did his best to prevent what he believed to be the murder of a woman. When he reported the death of Sītā to the princes, they both fell to the ground overwhelmed with grief. Rāma was silent, but Lakshmana complained at length of the unprofitable nature of a virtuous life. Wickedness seemed to bring no punishment, otherwise Rāvana would have been in hell. As far as he could see, what happened in life was the very opposite of what the Vedas taught.[1] The one desirable thing in life was wealth. The man who had money had everything. The want of it 'rendered this world naught even to ascetics practising righteousness.' Lakshmana ended these moralizings by saying to his brother, 'Rise up, O foremost of men. Why dost thou not understand thyself as the Supreme Soul.'[2]

[1] 'Righteousness and its opposite are found to have tendencies the very reverse of those assigned to them respectively (by the Vedas). . . But as prosperity attendeth those that are established in unrighteousness, and as those regardful of righteousness fare lamentably, these (i. e. virtue and vice) have not the sense assigned to them (by the scriptures). . . Or if it is said that one is slain, or slayeth another by ordinance, then it is Destiny, which is touched by the sinful act and not he. . . How can virtue, even if we grant its existence, find out the person that should be slain? If it had existed, thou wouldst not have come by any misfortune. But inasmuch as thou hast fallen into this plight, there is no such thing as virtue.' Quoted from Dutt. p. 1394.

[2] Lakshmana also says he never could understand why Rāma renounced his kingdom. This whole passage deserves to be read in full. It is exceedingly interesting, 'though the logic is all in a jumble,' to quote Mr. Dutt's note. See Dutt's translation, pp. 1393–1396.

Indrajit's sacrifice interrupted

At this stage, happily Vibhishan appeared on the scene. He was acquainted with his nephew's wiles and he at once assured the prince that the Sītā whom Indrajīt had killed was the work of magic. But he added what was of much more serious import. It was that Indrajīt had begun to celebrate another sacrifice in honour of the god of fire and other deities, which, if once completed, would render Indrajīt invincible. They must interrupt the sacrifice at all costs. If they did not succeed in doing so, they might reckon themselves as dead men.[1] Vibhishan proposed that Lakshmana and himself should tackle the demon. One point of great advantage he was able to reveal, and it was that if they once broke through the Rākshasa army, Indrajīt would have to become visible. This they apparently succeeded in doing, because throughout the long battle which ensued they were face to face with their enemy all the time. The result was very often in doubt. More than once Lakshmana and Vibhishan got completely worn out and had to relieve one another, while Hanumān acted as Lakshmana's steed. When Indrajīt was fighting with his uncle, he reproached him bitterly for deserting to the enemy, but Vibhishan made the effective retort that his conscience would not allow him to support any longer the workers of unrighteousness. A great many celestial weapons were employed on both sides. We read of arrows and darts, that had been consecrated to Agni, Indra, Shiva and Varuna. The gods on one occasion, when they saw Lakshmana very hard pressed, stood in front of him as a shield. Eventually Lakshmana fitted to his bow the Indra weapon. As he did so, he repeated the words, 'If Dasharatha's son, Rāma, is righteous and truthful, and if in prowess he hath no rival, then slay this son of Rāvana.'[2] This was too

[1] 'When, having finished the rites, he gets up, know that all of us are slain,' so said Vibhishan, and Rāma answered, 'Without doubt, he (Rāvana) is skilled in the Brahmā weapon, is potent in illusion and is possessed of exceeding strength. In conflict, he depriveth of consciousness, even the celestials with Varuna (at their head)' See Dutt's translation, p. 1399.

[2] See Dutt's translation, 1412.

much for Indrajīt. The arrow, blessed with such a powerful prayer, smote him in the neck and severed his head from his body. The monkeys raised a mighty cheer, in which gods and Gandharvas, Dānavas and Rishis joined. They said that godly Brāhmins would now be able to go about wherever they chose.[1] Rāma was equally delighted. He took his brother in his arms and kissed his head. By the kindness of Sushena, one of the monkey leaders, a highly potent medicine was produced, which when held 'to the nose of Lakshmana', healed him of his wounds, and restored him to his pristine vigour.

Rama and Ravana fight

Deprived of his sons and brothers Rāvana found it necessary to appear once more on the field of battle.[2] He travelled in a chariot drawn by eight horses. His body shone with the brilliance of a million suns. Though he boasted, after the manner of his kind, that he would that very day send both Rāma and Lakshmana to the dwelling place of Yama, so many baleful omens spoke to him of impending doom that his face grew pale and fear arrested his speech. When the two leaders met for the second time, no words were exchanged between them. According to the poet, the duel began by Rāma 'with delight' placing arrows on Rāvana's brow. But during a large part of the battle they appeared to have engaged in rendering powerless one another's weapons by the employment of others that were more powerful. For example, Rāvana used a Raudra weapon. To destroy its effect Rāma employed a Gandharva

[1] 'Now let the Brāhmins who have their sins removed, with their anxiety gone off, range about.'

[2] In his lament for Indrajīt Rāvana said that the gods would now be able to sleep in peace with such a mighty opponent overcome by death and time. He comforted himself however by the thought that Indrajīt was now in heaven, because heaven was the reward for the man who died in battle for his king. In his wrath Rāvana proposed to kill Sītā, but he was prevented from doing so by one of his courtiers who reminded him of the fact he had led the 'Brahmachārya mode of life, studied the Vedas, and always engaged in religious acts' and that it would be most improper of him to kill a woman. As for Sītā, when she thought she was going to be murdered, she expressed her regret that she had not accepted Hanumān's offer to carry her on his back to India. If she had done so, she would by this time have been safe in Ayodbyā.

weapon, which Rāvana in turn countered by a solar weapon. If they did manage to strike one another, it was often with no serious result, as when we are told that Rāvana smote Rāma on a vital part, and yet made no impression. Lakshmana also took part, though with more disastrous results. He succeeded in cutting off the head of Rāvana's charioteer, while Vibhishan killed the horses yoked to his car. Rāvana retaliated by attacking his uncle, but when Lakshmana intervened in this secondary combat, the demon king struck him with a dart that had been fashioned by Maya, the architect of the demons. Smitten by this dart, Lakshmana fell senseless to the ground. The monkeys tried in vain to extract the weapon, but Rāma, who indulged in a long lament over his brother, was eventually able to get it out. He also broke the dart in two. This was apparently somewhat of an achievement, as these celestial weapons had the highly convenient endowment of being able to return of their own accord to the quiver of their owner. Though the dart was extracted Lakshmana remained in a very dangerous condition. But, at the suggestion of Sushena, Hanumān went to the Himālayas again for the herb which had wrought such wonders a few days before in restoring Rāma, Lakshmana and the whole monkey host. On this occasion, also, Hanumān could not find the plant, and he did what he had done formerly; he brought the mountain itself. When he got back to Lankā, Sushena recognized the plant. He plucked it from the mountain and held it to Lakshmana's nose, with the result that he was healed of all his wounds. When Rāma told his brother that life was nothing, Sītā and victory nothing, if he did not live, Lakshmana rebuked him for his foolish words. He had made a vow and must keep it. He must slay Rāvana that very day.[1]

[1] One feels that this second visit to the Himalayas on the part of Hanumān is not a part of the original poem, but one of the many interpolations which have made it the size it is.

Thus encouraged and rebuked, Rāma resumed the contest. He said he would now do a deed of which both men and gods would speak as long as the earth endured. All this time Rāma had been fighting on foot while Rāvana was riding in his car. In the opinion of the gods this was hardly fair, and at their instigation Indra sent his chariot, along with Mātali its famous driver, for Rāma's use. On these more equal terms the duel began once more, and as before we find that when the one used a celestial weapon it was met by another celestial weapon, either of the same class or of another and more powerful order. Rāvana's arrows and darts, in addition to being in the shape of wild beasts, vomited forth fire, while Rāma's, shining like gold and as gorgeous as peacocks, flew over the ground in the shape of birds. Apparently during this second engagement Rāma was often very hard pressed, for the gods and Dānavas became very perturbed in mind as to the result. Earth, sky and ocean shared in their anxiety. The earth shook and the waves of the sea rose so high that they seemed to touch the sun which was darkened in the heavens. By this time the bodies of both combatants were covered with thousands of arrows, while blood poured from their wounds. After further contendings it would appear that the situation began to improve so far as Rāma was concerned, for we find that Rāvana became so stupefied that he 'could not discharge any weapon or bend his bow.' When he saw his foe in this condition, Rāma very generously refrained from attacking him. Rāvana's charioteer, realizing that his master was in a state of collapse, turned his horses' heads in the direction of Lankā and fled from the field. This cowardly act roused Rāvana from his swoon and he ordered the charioteer, in a lengthy reproach, to return at once. This was done, and the close of the contest was now begun.

The fight renewed

The gods had come to witness the battle. And in their midst stood Rāma's old friend, Agastya, who had befriended him in Dandaka forest and presented him

with many of his celestial weapons. He now approached the prince and told him to listen to 'the eternal secret' by means of which he would be able to emerge victorious over every foe. He thereupon repeated for the benefit of Rāma a hymn of praise, addressed to the Sun. This hymn largely consisted of a long list of names in which the Sun-god was told that he was Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva; that he was Skanda the god of war, Prajāpati the lord of creatures, Indra and Kuvera; that he was Yama, Soma and Varuna, the Ashwins, the Maruts and the Vasus, Agni, Vayu and Manu; that he was the Agnihotra sacrifice and the fruit obtained by offering that sacrifice; and the Lord of all acts that are performed by creatures.[1] Rāma was told that if a person recited this hymn he would never fall into any misfortune. He was therefore urged by Agastya to make use of it at once, being assured that if he '*worshipped this god of gods, this lord of the universe*,' he would that very instant conquer Rāvana. The prince was only too glad to act upon Agastya's advice. He repeated the hymn, looked at the Sun, sipped water several times, and with a confident mind advanced to meet Rāvana.

Rama's hymn to the Sun

And yet despite this marvellous help, despite the fact that the sun looked down with delight and told Rāma to bestir himself, the duel went on without cessation for seven days and seven nights. For seven days and seven nights the gods, Dānavas, Yakshas, Pisachas and serpents stood gazing from the battlements of heaven or from mountain tops, and told one another that Rāma was the champion of Brāhmins and cows. Rāvana was indeed no ordinary foe. He had put the gods to flight and held Indra a prisoner in his capital and the poet says

Ravana is slain

[1] The reader will find this hymn with many other names and attributes at pp. 1470–1473 of Dutt's translation, and in the additional notes appended to Griffith's translation, p. 554. Passages placed in inverted commas here and elsewhere, are, as a rule, quoted from Mr. Dutt's translation. Similar hymns will be found in the *Mahābhārata*, viz., the 1008 names of Shiva and the 1000 names of Vishnu. See *Summary*, pp. 175, 185, 197.

more than once, that it was a combat calculated to make one's hair stand on end. Rāvana had ten heads, and yet when Rāma cut off one, another grew in its place. Indeed before he had finished, not less than seven hundred heads had been cut oft, 'all equal in brilliance,' and Rāvana went on living. Rāma could not understand what it all ment, for he was using the very arrows with which he had killed Rāvana's friends and relations. But Mātali, Indra's charioteer, had also begun to wonder, though for another reason, and he asked the prince why he did not use the weapon he had got from Brahmā, by the hands of Agastya. It was a most wonderful weapon. The wind was its wings; its head was the fire and sun; its body was the sky. It was as heavy as the mountains Meru and Mandara combined. It was made of the essence of all created things. It was soaked in blood, it was dipped in marrow; an awe-inspiring sight. As he fitted this arrow to his bow, Rāma repeated sacred texts from the Vedas, while the earth trembled and every creature was filled with fear. There could be only one result. When the arrow struck Rāvana on the breast, his life at once departed from him and his dead body fell from the chariot to the ground. The monkeys roared with delight. The gods rained down flowers, and with the heavenly bards sang the hero's praise. The sun reappeared in the sky, and gentle winds began to blow, while the arrow after passing through the earth meekly returned to the quiver from which Rāma had taken it.

Vibhishan's coronation

His brother's death led Vibhishan to indulge in a number of very conflicting statements. In speaking of the demon king, he declared, 'The bridge of the pious has been broken, the figure of virtue has been spoiled, the refuge of the strong and powerful has disappeared, and thou hast attained to the state of the heroes. He propitiated fire, performed great austerities, was conversant with the Vedas and was a great performer of sacrifices.' He then asked for permission to perform

his brother's funeral rites. But a little later, when Rāma requested him to begin these rites and bring consolation to the widows of the deceased, he refused to do so ; he replied, 'I do not think it proper to perform his cremation ceremony who had renounced all pious deeds, was wicked, cruel, a liar, and who ravished other men's wives.' He added that people might think that in this respect his action had been cruel, but they would understand and approve when they heard of Rāvana's vicious deeds. Rāma, however, strongly disapproved of these sentiments, and said that Rāvana had been 'gifted with great prowess and energy.' He also spoke of him as a Kshatriya, possessed of the virtues of a Kshatriya, and saying that death had put an end to the enmity between them, declared 'he is as dear to me as unto thee.' [1] The cremation ceremony was performed with scrupulous care. Verses from the *Yajur Veda* were recited by Brāhmins. The sacred fire with sandal wood and other fragrant substances were produced from the place in which they were stored. Curds and clarified butter were poured upon the body. Beasts were slain '*according to the rites laid down in the Shastras and pointed out by the great saints.*' When Vibhishan had himself lighted the funeral pyre, the offering due to the spirit of the dead Rākshasa was complete. [2] There was one more task to perform, and that was to crown Vibhishan king of Lankā in succession to his brother. At Rāma's command Lakshmana escorted Vibhishan to the town of Lankā, and sprinkled on his head water that the monkeys brought from the ocean. This ceremony also

[1] The passages marked with inverted commas, are taken from Mr. Dutt's translation ; pp. 1484-6, and 1489. Mandodari the principal wife of Rāvana in lamenting her husband said she did not believe that his destruction was the work of Rāma. 'It is evident that the great ascetic, Vishnu, . . the soul of all things, ever existing without beginning, middle or end . . assuming the shape of a man and encircled by the celestials, assuming monkey shapes, hath for the behoof of mankind, slain thee the dreadful enemy of the gods.' Dutt, p. 1489.

[2] The reader will have observed how frequent are the references to the pitris or spirits of the dead (manes). Manu says that their worship was one of the five religious rites which should be performed every day. See *Summary of the Laws of Manu*, especially pp. 38 and 41.

was performed in strict accordance with the rites laid down in the Vedas.

Sita is sent for

Hanumān was now asked to go and tell Sītā that Rāvana had been slain, and that her husband desired to know how she fared.[1] He found her as he had found her on his former visit, seated at the foot of a tree and wearing a soiled garment. When she heard that her cruel captor was dead, and that Rāma was victorious and well, she was so overcome with joy that she could not speak. After a little, when she had partially recovered she was able to say, 'Take me to my husband.' But apparently she could not be taken immediately to the presence of her lord. Hanumān felt it necessary to return to Rāma and communicate Sītā's desire. And even when she was summoned, she was told that it was Rāma's wish that she should not come until she had bathed and been properly clothed. As he communicated Sītā's request, Hanumān saw that Rāma was weeping, while he sighed again and cast his eyes to the ground. When Sītā's toilet was complete, she was conveyed in a litter through the streets of Lankā. The monkeys, bears and Rākshasas pressed round in their desire to see the lady for whose wrongs so much blood had been shed. The attendants drove them back. But Rāma called aloud in anger and compassion, for bidding such rough treatment to those whom he looked upon 'as his own men.' Clothes and walls, he said, did not constitute a woman's veil. And one could see a woman without sin, in times of war and danger, at a sacrifice and at a marriage, and at the Svayamwara, when a maiden chose a husband for herself.[2] Besides he himself was present, and there

[1] One should have expected that Rāma would have gone to greet his wife, without waiting for the coronation of Vibhishan, but the surprising change in attitude towards Sītā of which we are now to read, explains the delay.

[2] At the Svayamwara, a maiden chose a husband for herself. It seems to have been a fairly common practice among princesses in ancient times. In the *Mahābhārata* we find that Kunti chose Pāndu; Draupadi; Arjuna, Savitri, Satyavān; and Damayanti, Nala; in each case from among many suitors, in public assembly. When Draupadi was compelled to appear in public on another occasion she protested strongly, saying that it was only at her Svayamwara that men had looked on her face. See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, pp. 22. 38. 46. 51. 68. 72. 94.

could be no harm. He therefore commanded that Sītā should get out of her palanquin and walk. The poor princess was very much distressed. She would have liked to hide herself for shame. Lakshmana, Sugriva, Vibhishan and Hanumān were all very sorry for her, but it was impossible to interfere.

Sita is repudiated

Gazing wistfully at her husband, and with eyes full of tears, wondering what it all meant, Sītā drew near and stood humbly before her lord. To her horror and amazement he spoke no words of endearment. He told her merely that he had removed the insult from his name and killed the cause of his disgrace, as it was his duty to do. But, for herself, she could go where she liked. He would have nothing to do with her. No man of respectable family could take back a wife who had lived so long in another's house. Rāvana had held her in his arms, and looked at her with lustful eyes. Indeed, she was so beautiful that Rāvana could not have refrained from doing evil. He had therefore no affection for her and he spoke as he did, 'impelled by his sense of duty.'[1] As she listened to this cruel sentence Sītā wept many bitter tears. But she had the courage and wisdom to defend herself vigorously. She very naturally asked the prince why he did not renounce her earlier. If Hanumān had told her that her husband had ceased to love her, she would have committed suicide then. It would have saved everybody a great deal of toil and trouble, and fewer lives would have been lost. It was a poor requital for all the love and devotion she had shown him. Her heart had always been his and his only. He professed to be a judge of character; he was ignorant of hers. He had seen other women and distrusted them. Was that a reason why he should distrust the whole sex?[2]

[1] The poet adds an explanation which is scarcely supported by the language Rāma himself employed. 'And beholding his beloved spouse near him and afraid of popular ignominy, his heart was broken in two. Dutt's translation, p. 1506.

[2] The average reader will acknowledge that Sītā is the most human and the best pourtrayed character in the poem. In the Appendix, I have ventured to give part of Rāma's accusation and part of Sītā's spirited reply, taken from Mr. Griffith's poetical version.

With these impassioned words, which were at once a protest and an appeal, Sītā turned to Lakshmana and asked him to erect funeral pyre. It was, she said her only refuge, nor did she wish to live longer with 'an unfounded stigma' on her name. When the fire had been got ready, she entered the flames with the touching appeal, 'As my heart hath never gone away from Rāma, do thou protect me, O fire, the witness of the people.' The whole company of spectators, both demons and monkeys, were filled with grief and wept aloud. As for Rāma, he stood silent, his eyes full of tears, and plunged in thought. Lakshmana had hoped that Rāma would interfere, but his only movement was a gesture that Sītā's resolve should be obeyed.

The ordeal of fire

But supernatural aid was close at hand. Brahmā, the creator god, accompanied by Indra of the thousand eyes, Varuna, the three eyed graceful Mahadeva,' Yama the god of death, and Kuvera the god of wealth, all appeared on the scene riding in their cars. They raised their mighty hands, which were 'decked with various ornaments and asked the prince why he, who was the 'protector of the worlds,' and foremost of the wise,' treated Sītā as he did, and allowed her to enter the fire. They asked him if he did not know that he was the first of all the gods and the creator of three worlds. They told him that the two Ashwins were his ears, and the Sun and Moon his eyes. He was the beginning and end of the creation. Why did he in his treatment of Sītā act like an ordinary man? To these questions Rāma replied: 'I know myself to be a man—Rāma, the son of Dasharatha. Let the great patriarch tell me who I am and whence I have come.'[1] In accordance with this request Brahmā informed Rāma that he was the great

The gods intervene

[1] These words with much else in the paragraph, I have quoted verbally from Mr. Dutt's translation, p. 1511. In view of its great interest and importance, I have ventured to give the whole of the God's hymn in praise of Rāma, in Appendix vi.

Nārāyana, the boar incarnation, the 'virtue of the pious,' the propounder of all laws, the excellent Purusha, Vishnu, Krishna, Mahendra, the foremost of the Vedas, the refuge of those who seek shelter and the sacred letters OM. He was gifted with a thousand legs, a thousand heads and a thousand eyes. He was manifest in all creatures, cows and Brāhmins. He had taken human shape to accomplish the destruction of Rāvana, while Sītā was the goddess Lakshmi. When Brahmā had finished his hymn of praise, the god of fire rose out of the flames with Sītā in his arms and addressed the prince.

Sita restored

The assurance which the god of fire gave regarding Sītā's purity was more than complete. It was true that she had lived in Rāvana's palace, but no sin had ever visited her. In neither thought, nor word and nor deed, had she ever been false to her husband. No gesture, no look had ever suggested an evil desire. These words of comfort and command filled Rāma with delight. But in justice to himself, and after a moment's silence, he said that because she had lived in Rāvana's palace, it was necessary that she should undergo some purification. If this had not been done, people would have entertained doubts and would have said that Rāma had been negligent and indifferent to the claims of morality. He knew that Rāvana could not approach her even as the ocean could not advance beyond its appointed mark. Sītā was his, he knew it, even as the sun's rays belonged to the sun. She was as dear to him as his own reputation, neither of which he could ever renounce. When husband and wife had thus been happily reconciled, Shiva and Indra gave expression to their congratulations. Shiva said they would welcome him to heaven at the close of a long and glorious reign, in which he would acquire wealth and fame by the performances of horse sacrifices and the making of gifts to Brahmins. When Indra expressed a desire to confer a boon upon him, Rāma asked that all the monkeys that had been killed in the war against Rāvana, might be restored to life. Indra

said it was a very large request to make. But he must keep his word. His promises were never falsified. Rāma's prayer was accordingly granted and the monkeys, much to their own surprise, found themselves alive.[1]

Rama sets out for home

Rāma was now all impatience to be gone to look once more upon his native country and the city of his birth. He asked Vibhishan to make arrangements for their speedy return. It was a long and difficult journey to Ayodhyā. Vibhishan entreated him to stay at least for a few days more and reminded him that Pushpaka, Rāvana's car, was at his disposal and would carry him to Ayodhyā in the shortest possible time. He could surely wait a few days more. But Rāma replied that for fourteen years Bharata had been wearing the garb of an ascetic and he did not wish him to suffer hardship one day longer than he could help. In response to these entreaties the car was immediately produced.[2] That huge and gorgeous aeroplane contained many spacious and splendid rooms, and was beautifully furnished with seats and cushions. It was as big as a mountain and in view of its size, Rāma was able to invite the bears and monkeys, Vibhishan and his courtiers, to go with him as fellow-passengers. As they journeyed through the air Rāma pointed out to Sītā the bridge that had been built across the straits and both together gazed down upon the places with which they had been acquainted in their years of pilgrimage. When the car passed over Kishkindhā, Sītā begged her husband to cause it to descend, and add to the

1 Dasharatha, also, by the kindness of Shiva appeared on the scene. The aged king said he occupied a very high place in heaven 'being an equal of the celestials,' but he was not happy without Rāma. 'Without thee, O Rāma, I do not like it, this is true—I do swear by thee.' At Rāma's request, he took back the curse he had uttered against Kaikeyi and her son Bharata. Dasharatha also advised Sītā not to be angry with Rāma for his treatment of her. It would do good to other females. Though the advice was unnecessary in her case, she should always say that her husband was '*her great god*.'

2 This car Pushpaka, of which we have already heard, and which Rāvana had taken from Kuvera, the god of wealth, never returned to Lankā. When he reached Ayodhyā, he told the car to go to its original owner, Kuvera. It may also be mentioned here that when Rāvana was killed, Rāma sent back to Indra the car which, with its charioteer, Mātali, the god had placed at his disposal.

company the monkeys' wives. This was done and Tārā, with many other female monkeys, joined their husbands and friends. At last they came within sight of Ayodhyā, and when he saw its walls once more, the prince addressing Sītā, who was seated in his lap, called out in rapture:

> I see, I see thy glittering spires,
> Ayodhyā, city of my sires;
> Bow down, bow down, thy head, my sweet,
> Our home, our long lost home to greet.

Very soon after, the aeroplane was halted over the hermitage of Bharadwāja, and Rāma paid a visit to that great and mighty saint. It was his intention to spend the night there and send Hanumān in advance to Ayodhyā that his brother might be made acquainted with all that had happened during the past fourteen years. With characteristic generosity Rāma instructed the son of the Wind god to discover from Bharata's look and gesture if he had any desire to retain the sovereignty of Ayodhyā, because, he added, if he shows the least regret at my return I shall never seek to deprive him of the kingdom.[1]

The meeting of the brothers

By the time Hanumān reached the presence of Bharata, fourteen years and five days had expired since the exile began, and there was no cause to fear that Bharata would wish to retain control of his brother's kingdom. The prince was over-joyed to hear that Rāma had returned safe and sound. And in gratitude to Hanumān for telling briefly the story of his brother's sufferings and achievements, he presented the monkey with one hundred thousand cows, 'hundreds of prosperous villages' and sixteen beautiful young and

[1] Bhāradwāja had already told Rāma that Bharata was still living the life of an ascetic and paying honour to his brother's sandals. It might be added that at Rāma's request the saint performed a miracle somewhat similar to the one recorded in the second book of the poem. All the trees between the hermitage and Ayodhyā were at the command of the saint, immediately loaded with the most delightful fruits and flowers, and began to pour forth honey for the benefit of the bears and monkeys. This happened over a stretch of country extending to three yojanas or 21 miles.

pious wives, adorned with ornaments and born of respectable families.[1] As we have seen, it was arranged that Rāma should spend the night with Bharadwāja with the intention of entering Ayodhyā the following day. Bharata at once began to make preparations for Rāma's reception. The road between the hermitage and Ayodhyā was carefully levelled and sprinkled with water. The houses and streets of the city were decorated with flags and flowers, while every man and woman that was able to travel, with musicians and dancing girls, queens, courtiers, and flatterers, went forth to meet their king. When they came in sight of Rāma, the people raised a shout that could be heard in heaven, while Bharata ran forward and bowed before him in the attitude of humble worship, with a respectful offering, and water to wash his feet. He also produced the sandals which he had treasured so long and said that with them he restored the kingdom that he had tried to govern in the absence of his rightful king. He now felt that he had not lived in vain, for the one desire of his heart was accomplished. His brother had come back from exile, to rule the country which was justly his. He begged Rāma to examine the state of the treasury and of the army. He would find that they had both increased ten-fold. The work of administration had been very difficult and often quite beyond his power. But the ass could not be expected to do the work of the horse, and he was glad to be relieved of a responsibility too heavy for his puny shoulders.[2]

The preparations for Rāma's coronation were now begun. Skilful barbers were called in to rid him of his matted locks. After a bath, his body was rubbed

[1] Bharata told Hanumān that during his administration he had protected the people of the four varnas or castes. At a later stage 'the twice-born and the people of diverse castes' are spoken of, and again in another place, 'Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and people of all other castes.'

[2] The use of the Portugese word *caste*, obscures the fact that the Sanskrit term, *varna* means *colour* and that in consequence the people of India always have insisted on a *colour bar*, the most rigorous the world has ever known.

It is also said that Bharata bowed to Sītā, and welcomed Lakshmana,

with paste, and he was clothed in beautiful garments. For the ceremony of anointing, the monkeys at the command of Sugriva,[1] brought water in golden jars from the four oceans, and no less than five hundred rivers. The aged minister Vasishtha,[2] assisted by Javāli, Gautama, Vāmadeva and other distinguished Brāhmins, who had served his father Dasharatha in the work of government, performed the coronation ceremony. It was they who placed Rāma on a jewelled seat with Sītā by his side. And it was their hands that sprinkled the water of anointing on his head.[3] When Rāma had taken his seat on another throne, Vasishtha placed upon his brow a jewelled crown, which the god Brahmā had made and which had been used in the family of Raghu since the days of Manu, the founder of their race and dynasty.[4] Shatrughna held above his brother's head the white umbrella, while Sugriva and Vibhishan had each a chowri committed to their charge. The gods showed their interest and approval by causing the wind to place on Rāma's neck two beautiful garlands. One was composed of jewels. The other was fashioned of an hundred golden lotuses, 'shining in their native lustre.' The Brāhmins were made the recipients of many splendid gifts, which included three hundred million golden coins. In this connexion Sītā performed a very gracious act. She had received from her husband, among other gifts, a pearl necklace.

Rama's coronation

[1] It is interesting to read that shortly before the ceremony began, Sugriva, Hanumān and other monkeys went to the town, to see the sights. Sitā also escorted the wives of Sugriva on a similar errand. Rāma was very attentive to his monkey allies during their stay in Ayodhyā. They were furnished with nine thousand elephants, on which thay rode through the city during the ceremonies of coronation.

[2] Vasishtha, one of the great Rishis, and the ancient rival of Vishvāmitra, so often spoken of in the first book of the poem. Nothing is said of Vishvāmitra. Why was he not at the coronation?

[3] Representatives of the first three castes and maidens also shared in this rite, while the gods sprinkled Rāma with the juice of a plant called Oshadhis, from their station in the sky. See Dutt's translation, p. 1545.

[4] Manu, the acting creator of the present universe, or first man, was the father of Ikshvāku, from whom Rāma traced his descent. He was the builder and first king of Ayodhyā. See Note 9.

Out of gratitude to Hanumān for the great services he had rendered, and with her husband's approval and consent she removed it from her own neck, where Rāma had placed it, and gave it to the Wind god's son.

Rama's long and happy reign

When the coronation ceremonies were over, the monkeys, bears and Rākshasas, received permission to depart for their homes, loaded with gifts, and assured of Rāma's lasting gratitude. And with these ceremonies, which the poet describes with unusual brevity, the poem also reaches a rapid close. A few bare facts are given. Rāma wished to make Lakshmana the heir-apparent to his throne. When he refused to yield to his brother's repeated solicitations, the succession was allotted to Bharata. During his long reign, which lasted ten thousand years, Rāma performed many great sacrifices, in particular, the Ashvamedha or horse sacrifice, which he celebrated on ten different occasions.[1] His subjects had no kind of worry or trouble. Widows were never in distress. People did not suffer from disease. They were never attacked by wild beasts. Children did not die before their parents, and the old never had the melancholy duty of performing funeral ceremonies for the young. Because every one lived for a thousand years and had a thousand children. Even nature shared in the universal joy. Trees were covered with fruits and flowers the whole year round, pleasant winds blew and rain fell whenever it was required.

Epilogue

'This sacred epic, the first of its kind, affording piety, fame and long life, and describing the conquest of kings, was composed by Vālmīki in the days of yore.' The man who reads it will be freed from his sins. If he desires children, wealth and long life, he will obtain them. If

[1] It is said 'with his sons, brothers and friends.' And yet no other mention is made of sons, and we are told that Bharata was chosen as heir apparent. In the seventh book, we shall find that two sons were born to Sītā, when she was once more an exile in Vālmīki's hermitage,

he listens to its recital, in a proper spirit, and with 'his anger subdued,' he will be delivered from all his troubles. If he keeps the book in his house he will not be vexed by 'evil spirits.' Travellers in foreign countries, if they make it their study, will return in safety to their native land to dwell among their friends and kindred. Pregnant women who listen to it will give birth to excellent sons. It is the duty of Kshatriyas to listen with bowed heads to its daily recital by the mouths of Brāhmins. Kings who act on this advice will be victorious in battle. The gods and our ancestors find pleasure in this story of the deeds of Rāma. And Rāma is pleased with those who read or listen to the whole. For 'Rāma is the ever-existing Vishnu, the first God, the huge-armed Hari, Nārāyana and Lord.' 'Therefore it behoveth those good men who wish for prosperity to hear the story perpetually.'

NOTE

In his translation of the *Rāmāyana*, Mr. Griffith remarks: 'The *Rāmāyan* ends, epically complete, with the triumphant return of Rāma and his rescued queen to Ayodhyā, and his consecration and coronation in the capital of his forefathers. Even if the story were not complete, the conclusion of the last canto of the sixth Book (evidently the work of a later hand than Vālmīki's), which speaks of Rāma's glorious and happy reign and promises blessings to those who read and hear *Rāmāyan*, would be sufficient to show that, when these verses were added, *the poem was considered to be finished.* The *Uttarakānda* or *Last Book*, is merely an appendix or supplement and relates only events antecedent or subsequent to those described in the original poem. Indian scholars, however, led by reverent love of tradition, unanimously ascribe this *Last Book* to Vālmīki, and regard it as part of the *Rāmāyan*.' (p. 514.)

Assuming that this statement is correct such a conclusion would involve the opinion that the references to Sītā's second repudiation, the birth of her two sons in Vālmīki's hermitage, and their recitation of the *Rāmāyana* in their father's presence, all recorded in the first book, must also be additions to the original poem and the work of a 'later hand.'

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST BOOK

The sages visit Rama

When Rāma had been installed in his kingdom, a large number of ascetics honoured him by a visit. They came, attended by their disciples, to congratulate him on his victory over Rāvana, and his safe return to Ayodhyā. A long list of names is given, including Agastya, Atri, Bharadwāja, Vasishtha, and Vishvāmitra, all of whom we have met with before in the course of the story, but Kashyapa, Jamadagni and the *seven sages* were also members of this distinguished company.[1] When Rāma saw his honoured guests he approached them with the greatest reverence. He bowed before their feet, presented the usual offerings, and 'consecrated a cow to each.' When they had all been seated according to their rank, and the usual enquiries as to one another's welfare had been made, they gave expression to the pleasure they felt at seeing the prince seated on the throne of his ancestors, free from all anxiety and successful over his foes. In the course of conversation Rāma began to question the sages regarding the life history of Rāvana, his sons and more disting uished followers. This led to a long dissertation on the part of Agastya which occupies half of the *Uttara Kānda.* The sage discoursed on Rāvana's many battles with gods, demons and men. It would appear that he had fought with two of Rāma's own ancestors, one of whom prophesied

[1] The *seven sages* as Mr. Dutt recognizes, were the Prajāpatis, or mind-born sons of Brahmā who, according to the sixth book of the poem, had already gone to form the constellation known as the *Great Bear.* According to the *Shatapatha Brāhmana* they were Gotama, Bharadwāja, Vishvāmitra, Jamadagni, Vasishtha, Kashyapa and Atri. The *Mahābhārata's* list always included six names, Atri, Marichi, Angiras, Pulaha, Pulastya and Kratu, with a variation in the seventh, e.g. Vasishtha or Daksha. The reader will notice that whatever list is taken, it overlaps with the list of miscellaneous names which the poet gives in addition.

that Rāvana would perish at the hands of Dasharatha's son.[1]

Why Ravana carried off Sita

The two concluding episodes, to which Rāma and the other sages listened with interest and delight, deserve to be recorded here, because they were told as the explanation why Rāvana carried off Sītā. They happened long ago in the golden age.[2] One day Rāvana met Sanatkumāra[3] the son of Brahmā, and asked him who was the most powerful of the gods; the chief object of worship among scholars and saints. Sanatkumāra replied that there was no doubt that Hari Nārāyana was the greatest of the gods.[4] He was worshipped by both celestials and demons as well as men. It was from his navel that Brahmā the world's great creator rose. When Hari killed any demon or king he raised him to his own region in the skies. It was true that they had to return to the earth and pass through many births and deaths in accordance with the happiness and misery they had already acquired in former lives. But one thing was always certain; Nārāyana's anger was a boon. Rāvana was both surprised and delighted as he lightened to these words and resolved that he would seek for an opportunity of fighting with Hari. It was necessary however, that he should be able to recognize the god when he saw him, and he asked the saint to tell him what were the marks of the god. Sanatkumāra replied that this great deity pervaded all things. He was the sacred letters OM; he was Savitri, Brahmā, Rudra, Indra,

[1] A brief summary of Agastya's narrative will be found in Appendix vii. It should be noted that the sage repeatedly tells Rāma that he is the *eternal Vishnu* and the *god of gods*.

[2] The first of the four ages, Krita-yuga, was followed by Tretā-yuga. According to this passage it was then that Vishnu or Nārāyana, as he is called here, was born as Rāma.

[3] Sanatkumāra was a highly mysterious rishi referred to in the *Mahābhārata*. Under the name of Sanatsujata, he gave a long philosophical discourse which is reproduced in the fifth book of that poem. He is said to have been one of four mind-born sons of Brahmā, who, declining to create progeny, remained ever pure and innocent. See Dowson's *Hindu Classical Dictionary*.

[4] Hari and Nārāyana are both names used for Vishnu. The name Nārāyana was first applied to Brahmā.

Vishnu and many others. He was the creator, destroyer and governor of all. He was night and day; he was the wind and the water. In fact, as the sage said, 'What is the use of speaking more? He comprehends the three worlds.' Only those with whom he was pleased were able to see him; gifts, sacrifices, asceticism, self-control were of no avail.[1] If Rāvana wished to see him, he would tell him how it would be possible. At the close of the first age and the beginning of the second (Tretā-Yuga) Nārāyana would appear on earth in the form of a man, as Rāma son of Dasharatha. By command of his father and accompanied by his brother and his incomparable wife, Sītā, he would dwell in Dandaka forest. The saint added that Sītā would come out of the earth and be an incarnation of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and Vishnu's queen. Such was the wonderful tale that Rāvana heard from Sanatkumāra, and Agastya's comment upon it was that Rāvana began immediately '*to concert plans for entering into conflict with thee.*' 'It was for this reason that the vicious-souled Rāvana stole away Sītā.'[2]

As Rāma listened to this story, wonder filled his heart and he gazed at the sage with open-eyed amazement. But he was not satisfied and asked for more. The sage thereupon proceeded to tell another story, to illustrate the same divine theme. He had heard it from the rishi Nārada, who told it to him as they were seated together on the top of Mount Meru.[3] Gods and ascetics, Gandharvas and Siddhas were among the listeners. And it was a story worth listening to, for, as the celestials themselves said, the man who listens to it every day will be blessed with sons and grandsons

Ravana's visit to the White Island

[1] 'Those alone can see him who have devoted themselves, their life and being unto him, and who by virtue of discriminative knowledge have got their sins burned.' Dutt's Translation, p. 1699.

[2] See Dutt's Translation, p. 1700. This whole passage is not very clear but as the context will show, the idea is that Rāvana thought that if he provoked a conflict with Rāma he would thereby get to Nārāyana's heaven.

[3] The reader will remember that Nārada appears at the beginning of the first book. See also Note 2.

and obtain an honoured place in heaven. One day, said Nārada, when he was coming down from heaven, he met Rāvana. The Rākshasa had been travelling all over the world, looking for gods and demons and inviting them to battle. Joining his hands together, Rāvana accosted the sage with the polite remark, that Nārada had seen all creations 'from Brahmā down to an insect,' and he would be obliged if he would tell him in what world the strongest and most powerful were to be found. Nārada replied that, if Rāvana went to the *White Island* in the *Sea of Milk*,[1] he would find people very beautiful and very patient, but also of huge bodies and as strong as he could wish to see. Best of all, however, the inhabitants of the White Island were 'perpetually devoted to Nārāyana,' worshipping him with all their hearts. It was because they had 'rendered their lives and souls to Nārāyana' that they were privileged to dwell in the White Island. Nārada then added the somewhat contradictory statement that it was not by penance, sacrifice, gifts and self-control that a man attained to that blessed region, but by being slain in battle by the god.[2] This statement made a great impression on the mind of Rāvana, and after he had thought for a long time, he said to Nārada, 'I shall go and fight with Nārāyana.' And sure enough he set off forthwith, inviting the sage to accompany him. Nārada was always fond of strife and entertainment. He therefore decided to go, but he went by himself and reached the White Island before Rāvana arrived. The Rākshasa went in his car

[1] In the *Summary of the Mahābhārata*, pp. 177, 180, the reader will find a description of a visit paid to the White Island by the rishi Nārada. It is one of the most remarkable passages in the literature of India. Manifestly the compilers of both epics had the same material before them, or the one borrowed from the other.

[2] 'Neither by sacrifice, devout penance, self-control nor excellent gifts, may be obtained the excellent regions full of bliss.' 'The inhabitants of Swetadwipa are perpetually devoted unto Nārāyana with whole-mindedness. and earnestly worship Him.' 'Having rendered their lives and souls unto Nārāyana they have been blessed with their abode in Swetadwipa.' 'Those who are slain in the encounter with his bow, bent by Vishnu, the holder of the discus and the preserver of the world, attain to the celestial region.' Dutt's Translation, p. 1702.

Pushpaka, attended by a large army. But somehow the heat that prevailed on the island was too much for the car, and Rāvana had to send it back; while his army was filled with fear, it is not said of what, and made off for their own country as quickly as they could. Rāvaṇa was thus entirely alone when he landed on the White Island. And when he did land he could see nobody. But after a little a number of young women saw him and approached with the request, smilingly put, that he would tell them who he was and for what purpose he had come. The demon explained that he was Rāvana, and that he wanted to fight, but he didn't see anybody to fight with. As he said this Rāvana looked very big and very fierce, but the damsels were not in the least afraid. Indeed one of them lifted him up, as if he were a child, and tossed him into the hands of one of her neighbours. As she did so she said, 'See what I have done. This black Rāvana, with his ten heads and twenty arms, is no bigger than a little tiny insect.' Rāvana did not at all like being tossed about from hand to hand by a lot of laughter-loving maidens. He bit the hand of one and scratched another with his nails. His second victim punished him badly, for she flew up into the air with him and then dropped him into the sea. In fact they seem to have done so more than once, to the great terror of Rāvana. This whole episode gave Nārada huge delight, and he danced with mingled amazement and joy. At this point the story comes suddenly to an end. We are told nothing more about the White Island or Rāvana's tormentors. But we get the same comment upon it from Agastya as he had made before, 'Being apprised of this, the vicious souled Rāvana stole away Sītā with a view to meeting death at thy hands.'

The sages depart

When he had told these two incidents in the remarkable career of Rāvana, Agastya, on his own behalf and that of his fellow sages, asked permission to depart. But before he left he went through another long address in which he told the prince that he was

Nārāyana, and asked him if he did not recognize himself as such. Not only had he been born as Rāma, son of Dasharatha, to bring about Rāvana's death, but he had been, as a son of Aditi and the youngest brother of Indra, to circumvent Bali and traverse the world in three steps.[1] He was the eternal Vishnu, the god of gods, He was worshipped by all the deities. He was himself the three Vedas, the three qualities,[2] and the three worlds, while Sītā was an incarnation of Lakshmi, born in the race of Janaka, but sprung from the earth. During her imprisonment in Lankā Rāvana had treated her with as much reverence as if she were his own mother. As they listened to these words the people of the four castes, Brāhmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, with the bears, monkeys and Rākshasas, gazed with open-eyed wonder and gladness at their much loved king.

Rama's levee

Apparently the sages and ascetics had made their visit of congratulation on the very day that Rāma was enthroned. And as the sun set soon after their departure, the prince retired to his own apartment in the palace. The next canto tells with interesting detail, how Rāma spent the following day. With the coming of dawn, he was wakened from sleep by eulogists and singers who told him that he was the equal of Vishnu in prowess, of Brihaspati in intellect, of the Ashwins in beauty, of Brahmā in governing capacity, of the earth in patience and of the moon in gentleness. There never had been and there never would be a king like him. To these flattering strains Rāma got out of bed, and was at once surrounded by thousands of servants carrying vessels full of water. His first task was to rinse his mouth. Thereafter he made an oblation to fire, and entered the room sacred to the guardian deity of the

[1] This of course refers to Vishnu's incarnation as a dwarf. For Vishnu as one of the *Adityas*, see Note 3.

[2] The Three Qualities or gunas are goodness or purity, passion or activity, and darkness or ignorance (Sattva, Rajas and Tamas). According to the *Laws of Manu*, all existences are pervaded by the three qualities at all times. The character of each soul depends on which of these dominates the body.

Ikshvāku race. When he had worshipped the gods, the spirits of his ancestors and Brāhmins, he made his appearance in the hall of assembly. He was at once respectfully greeted by the numerous kings who had come to be present at his coronation, as well as by his brothers, and by Sugriva, Jāmbavān, Vibhishan and Hanumān. Indeed the greetings he received were more like acts of worship. For it is said that Rāma was 'like a sacrifice conducted by Vedic hymns,' while the effulgence of his glory was so great that his servants, as they stood before him, kept their eyes shut. The rest of that day appears to have been spent in listening to the recitation of 'religious themes' by persons conversant with the knowledge of the Purānas.[1]

The kings and monkeys depart

After a few days had elapsed, Rāma gave the assembled kings permission to depart to their own countries. There were not less than three hundred of them. They all expressed their great regret that they had not been invited to assist in the attack upon Lankā. Gifts of great value were exchanged and Rāma made the polite observation that it was by means of their strength he had been able to conquer Rāvana. More than a month passed before the monkeys and bears were able to tear themselves away from their dear friend and protector. As they said good bye Hanumān prayed that he might always be devoted to Rāma, while the prince renewed his thanks for the invaluable help he had received from the wind god's son.[2]

[1] The word Purāna means *old traditional stories*. There are eighteen Purānas recognized in Hinduism to-day. But these, of course, are not the Purānas referred to in the Epics.

[2] Rāma said that Hanumān's life and fame would last as long as the story of his adventures would be current upon earth. And as long as the world lasted that story would be told. Dutt. p. 1712. The reader will remember that Rāma sent the car Pushpaka back to its original owner, Kuvera. At this stage we read that the car came back to Rāma with a message from Kuvera, that he wished Rāma to keep it. The prince accepted the gift, but gave the car liberty to go where it wished on condition that it came to his presence when he called it.

The poem now becomes remarkably brief in its statements. It tells us that Rāma spent his days in looking after the affairs of his kingdom, that he lived happily with his brothers, and wandered in the woods with Sītā by his side. There was in particular a garden to which they had given the name of Ashoka, full of trees and flowers, the favourite haunt of birds, adorned with lakes and pools of pure water, and surrounded by stone walls. To this garden Rāma and Sītā often turned their steps. They were fond of having picnics there. And their servants brought them 'well cooked meat and various fruits.' They drank wine, too, that had been 'distilled in the province of Mirā,' while beautiful Apsarasas, the worse for liquor, danced and sang in their presence. It was in this way, we are told that ten thousand happy years passed away.[1] One evening when Rāma entered the apartment in his palace where Sītā was, he noticed that his queen was pregnant. Filled with joy, he asked her if there was any desire in her heart that he could satisfy. Sītā replied that there was one thing that she greatly wished to do, and that was to pay a visit to the hermits in the forest. Even one night in their society, spent on the banks of the Ganges, would afford her great delight. Rāma was only too pleased to gratify her wish, and promised that he would make arrangements for her going the very next day.

Sita is pregnant

When he had made this promise, Rāma passed forth to the outer hall of the palace, where he found a number of his friends and counsellors waiting to receive him. Apparently it was their custom to entertain the prince by telling amusing stories. And that night in the

The people slander Sita

[1] One reads this with surprise, especially in view of the succeeding verse that tells of Sītā's pregnancy. We shall quote the passage with the context. 'Sītā and Rāghava thus spent their days happily. And thus was spent the delightful winter, giving all enjoyments. Enjoying various things, the high-souled Rāma and Sītā spent 10,000 years.' Dutt. p. 1716. A later canto, however, (112) shows that the repudiation took place soon after their return from Lankā and that Rāma lived many thousand years thereafter and did not take any other spouse. Dutt. p. 1914 (1834).

course of their talk, Rāma observed that kings were often criticized and blamed by their subjects. He would greatly like to know what the people of Ayodhyā and the provinces said about himself, his brothers and Sītā. Turning to one of those present, called Vadra, he asked him to tell them what the people said, and to conceal nothing, either good or bad. Because if there was anything wrong that he had done, he would take steps to amend it. Vadra thereupon told the king that the people blamed him for taking back Sītā. She had been a prisoner in Rāvana's capital. The demon had held her in his arms. And yet Rāma had not seemed to care. He was not the least jealous and was entirely happy in her society. All this the people said was bound to have a very bad effect on their own wives. It set a bad example which was certain to be followed, because subjects always followed in the footsteps of their king. Rāma was very greatly distressed by these observations of Vadra, and turning to the rest of the company he asked if it was indeed true that the people talked about him in that way. When they assured him that it was so, he dismissed the gathering and sent a warder to summon his brothers to come to him without a moment's delay.

Sita's second repudiation

When the brothers reached the palace they found the king plunged in sorrow. And his first words to them were that they must not seek to hinder him in what he had resolved to do. He then told them what he had heard. The censure of the people had pierced his heart. He did not for a moment question Sītā's virtue. They remembered how, when Rāvana was slain, he had been afraid of the criticism of his subjects and how Sītā herself had entered the testing fire. And they remembered also how the assembled gods had given ample assurance of her chastity. But, in view of what people were saying, it was not possible for him to allow Sītā to remain any longer in his society. His reputation was dearer to him than life itself. And

he had therefore resolved that Lakshmana must take her away 'to another country' on the following day. He had already fixed on her place of exile, the hermitage of Vālmīki, on the other side of the Ganges, beside the river Tamasā, its tributary stream. Fortunately it would be easy to take Sītā there without trouble or complaint. For only that evening he had, in accordance with her own request, promised to send her to live among the hermits for a single night. Under the impression that she was setting forth upon this brief and pleasant outing, Lakshmana was to escort her to Vālmīki's hermitage. Once she reached that place it would be Lakshmana's business to break to her the news that she would not be allowed to return. In conclusion Rāma declared that if his brothers tried, in any way, to hinder or prevent the decision he had arrived at, he would look upon them as his enemies for evermore. When he had thus issued his command, the heart-broken prince rose and left the room, sighing like an elephant and his eyes full of tears.[1]

Sita sets out for the forest

Little realizing the great calamity that was about to befall her, Sītā was ready at dawn to set out upon her journey to the forest. Lakshmana was waiting to escort her. They travelled in a chariot driven by Sumantra, who had taken her and Rāma into exile many years before. Strange to say there is no mention of Rāma being present to bid her farewell, nor of any desire on Sītā's part to see her husband before she set out. They had not gone far before Sītā declared that she was strangely depressed in mind, and that her right eye had begun to throb. She asked Lakshmana if he was sure that all was well. She wondered if there was anything wrong with her mothers-in-law,

[1] It is difficult to realize on what principle of either religion or morality, the poet should attribute such base and callous conduct to his hero. Happily for the fair fame of India's Sir Galahad, we can believe that a meaner as well as a later hand is responsible not only for the wordy and futile stuff in which this seventh book abounds, but also for the foolish and grotesque story of Sītā's second repudiation.

and sought comfort in prayers addressed to the gods. Lakshmana with difficulty assumed a cheerful aspect and told her not to be afraid. He knew that all was well. They journeyed all that day and spent the night at a hermitage on the banks of the Gomatī river. By noon on the following day they reached the shores of the Ganges, that sacred stream whose waters remove all sin. Here Lakshmana overcome by emotion began to weep, much to Sītā's surprise; for, as she said, she herself was overjoyed to think that she was privileged to stand on so holy a spot. It was a time for gladness, not for tears. But then, she thought, he is remembering Rāma and cannot endure to be parted from him even for a little while. And so she began to tell him that after an interval of two days they would be united once more. They would spend one night only with the ascetics and then return home. He might be quite sure that she was as anxious as he was to look on Rāma's face.

Sita's grief

By this time a boat had been got ready to ferry them across the Ganges. When they reached the further shore and Sītā was proceeding in the direction of Vālmīki's hermitage, Lakshmana asked her to pause. He had, he said, a sad duty to perform, and before he spoke further, he wished her to understand that he was is no way responsible for it. When he had got so far, Lakshmana broke down, unable to say another word. The poor queen tried her best to comfort him, and begged him to tell her the secret of his grief. In broken accents Lakshmana was able at last to explain. Although her innocence had been fully and publicly proved, Rāma had resolved to disown her because of what the citizens had said, and now on 'the pretext of satisfying' her desire, Rāma had ordered him to leave her in the hermitage of Vālmīki.[1] Sītā was overwhelmed with grief and fell senseless to the ground. When she

1 'Rama hath commanded me to leave thee near the hermitage on the pretext of satisfying thy desire; as thou art big with child.' Dutt's Translation, p. 1726.

recovered consciousness, she spoke very touchingly of her past experience of forest life, happy in the love and tenderness of her lord. But now she was to live alone. She could not bear the thought. Her natural desire was to cast herself into the Ganges and be at rest. But that could not be, because she bore beneath her breast that which would prevent 'the termination of her husband's race.' A woman's husband was 'her god, her friend, her spiritual guide.' It was her duty therefore to labour for his welfare, even if it involved the loss of her own life. Rāma knew that she was innocent. He had renounced her for the sake of his good name. She would support him in his efforts to preserve it from all stain. She was most of all sorry that the citizens of Ayodhyā had been so uncharitable and unjust. She hoped, however, that her husband would continue to treat them like brothers and protect them from harm.

Sita is befriended by Valmiki

Realizing that it was best for both that they should separate at once, Lakshmana re-entered the boat and, when he had reached the further shore, mounted his chariot and drove off as quickly as he could. Looking back time after time he saw the hapless queen rushing wildly along the river bank, or casting herself in a paroxysm of grief upon the ground. Her cries soon attracted the attention of Vālmīki's disciples, who hurried to their master with the news that they had seen a lady as beautiful as Lakshmi, abandoned and alone, the very image of sorrow. Vālmīki was a great ascetic and was able to tell all that happened in heaven, earth and hell. He was already acquainted with the calamity that had befallen Sītā, and knew that she was coming to his hermitage. He therefore approached the queen with words of comfort, and told her not to grieve. She was to look upon that place as her home. Everyone who lived there would treat her as their daughter. As he said this Vālmīki escorted the queen to where the wives of his fellow ascetics were gathered, and committed her to the care of these aged dames.

His first words to them were, that she was worthy of their reverence and love. She had been renounced by her husband, but he knew, in virtue of his ascetic merit, that she was absolutely free from blame.

Bhrigu's curse of Vishnu

On the way home to Ayodhyā Lakshmana told the charioteer that he could not understand why Rāma had paid any attention to the foolish censures of the people. Nor did he see how any one could acquire fame by doing such a wicked deed as banishing Sītā. But apparently Rāma, who was able to defy gods and demons, was in the hands of destiny. Sumantra, however, brought comfort to Lakshmana by telling of something that happened years before in the life time of king Dasharatha. The aged king had told it to him under a pledge of secrecy, but in view of its strange fulfilment he felt that he might divulge it now. Once upon a time Dasharatha had visited the hermitage of Durvāsa, the son of Atri. In the course of conversation the king asked the ascetic how long his sons, Rāma and the others, would live and what would be the end of his race. In reply the rishi told the king a story. In ancient days when the gods and Asuras were at war, the demons took refuge with the wife of Bhrigu.[1] The gods were very angry at the lady for hearing the cry of the suppliants and Hari, the king of the celestials, cut off her head. The husband naturally was roused to fury at the sight of his wife's dead body, and he cursed the god. The curse was to the effect that Vishnu would be born among men, and be separated for many long years from his wife. After uttering the curse the ascetic felt sorry that he had spoken, but the god accepted it with the remark that after he had killed Rāvana and others, he would, for the sake of mankind,

1 'Your Priest,' said Durvāsa to Dasharatha. Bhrigu's name certainly appears in one of the lists of Rāma's ministers.

submit himself to the imprecation.[1] Greatly comforted by the charioteer's story, Lakshmana continued his journey and reached Ayodhyā by noon of the following day.

Lakshmana comforts Rama

He went at once to the royal palace, to give a full report of all that he had done. He found his brother the very image of grief and felt that he must try and bring some comfort to his heart. And so he began to discourse on the passage of time. Where there was growth, there must be decay; where there was prosperity, there was ruin; where there was birth, there was death. 'Therefore attachment to wife, sons, friends and riches is not proper,' because one must part with them sometime. The pain of separation from Sītā was a small matter, which Rāma should be able to bear.[2] Great men like him were never overcome by sorrow. And if he showed that he was still grieving for Sītā, the people would begin to blame him again. These observations on the part of his brother were sufficient to rouse the king to a proper sense of his duty, and he said that he was very glad that Lakshmana had carried out his orders so completely. His brother's pleasant words had removed entirely all feelings of sorrow.[3]

The king who was changed into a lizard

During the four days that had passed since Lakshmana and Sītā left for the forest, Rāma's grief had prevented him from attending to his duties as king, and he told his brother that he felt very keenly this neglect on his part. Kings who failed to give daily attention to affairs of state were doomed to

1 Durvāsa also informed the king that after reigning for 11,000 years Rāma would go to Brahmā's heaven, that he would establish many royal families, 'celebrate many horse sacrifices with profuse gifts,' and that Sītā would be the mother of two sons. It was evidently the promise of heirs who would sit on Rāma's throne that made Lakshmana feel so happy.

2 See Dutt's translation, p. 1735–36.

3 Rama with great delight, said 'Thou hast spoken the truth, O Lakshmana, O foremost of men. I have been greatly delighted, O hero, for thy carrying out my orders; my grief and sorrow have been removed for these pleasant words of thine.' (Dutt's Trans. p. 1736.) All this is extraordinarily stupid.

suffer punishment in hell. He had heard in illustration of that truth, a dreadful story of a king called Nriga, a very devout person too, he was. On the occasion of a pilgrimage to Pushkara he had distributed among the members of the Brāhminical caste ten million cows, each of which was attended by her calf, and was adorned with ornaments of gold. And yet this king, because he kept two Brāhmins waiting at his palace gate—they had come to see him about the disputed ownership of a cow he had presented to one of them—was cursed by these two holy men and changed into a lizard. He was told that he would have to remain in this abject condition for hundreds and thousands of years. Indeed he was still in that condition, although the promise had been made to him that he would be set free from his curse when Vishnu was born in the family of Vasudeva, an event which would not take place till the approach of the fourth age.[1] The cow about which the two Brāhmins quarrelled was an old and feeble creature, and they finally settled their dispute as to the ownership by giving her to a caste-fellow. But think of it! said Rāma, the poor king is still suffering from that curse. Urged by the thought of such an awful penalty for kings who kept suppliants waiting for justice, Rāma bade Lakshmana go and find out if there was anybody wanting to see him. But Lakshmana said he would like very much to hear what king Nriga did when the Brāhmins cursed him. Rāma replied that Nriga sent for his priest, his ministers and subjects and, telling them what had happened, requested them to arrange for his son's coronation that very day.[2] He also commanded his builders to erect three dwellings for him, one for summer, one for winter, and another for the rainy

[1] This of course refers to the incarnation of Vishnu as Krishna. His death was supposed to close the third or Dwāpara age, and to mark the commencement of the present evil age, or Kali-yuga. He is also spoken of here as the Rishi Nara-Nārāyana. See the *Mahābhārata's* use of that term.

[2] He said that the Brāhmins who cursed him were 'the jolly saint Nārada and the ascetic Parvata' and that they had gone off like the wind to Brahmā's heaven. See Dutt's Translation. p. 1739, which I quote.

season, and to plant round about them great numbers of trees, which would yield both fruits and flowers. His hope was that by making these arrangements for his own comfort, he would be able to pass the time happily and to some extent evade the full burden of the Brāhmins' curse. Before departing for his place of retreat Nriga gave his son some good advice as to how he should govern his subjects. As to his own sad fate, and the very slight cause which had roused the anger of the Brāhmins, he told his son not to grieve. No one could withstand the decrees of time and destiny. They must accept what was ordained and travel their appointed path, remembering that the things which they had done in a former life were responsible for what happened to them in this.

Having finished his story about Nriga Rāma proceeded to tell another. In this case, the hero was one of his own family and race, the twelfth son of Ikshvāku. His name was Nimi, and he built for himself a beautiful city called Vaijayanta, near the hermitage of the rishi Gautama. On one occasion he decided to celebrate a great sacrifice and invited his royal father, Ikshvāku, with Gautama, Atri, Angiras, Bhrigu and Vasishtha, to grace it with their presence. When Vasishtha received his invitation, he told the king that he had already agreed to celebrate a sacrifice at the request of the god Indra, but would come whenever it was finished. The king was not to commence his own until he should arrive. But Gautama took upon himself to begin the sacred rite without waiting for Vasishtha. This was not to be wondered at, because when Vasishtha did come, more than five thousand years had elapsed. That 'blameless and illustrious rishi' was very angry when he found Gautama acting in his place, and he at once cursed the king for not obeying his orders. Nimi was asleep at the time. But when he awoke and saw what had happened, he gave as good as he got and called down the same curse upon the saint. One verse says

Story of king Nimi and Vasishtha

that the curse was to the effect that their bodies would remain senseless. But the next verse says that they were deprived of their bodies and changed into air. Whatever happened, their bodiless spirits made appeal to the celestials. Vasishtha appealed to the god Brahmā, and pointed out how painful it was to go about without a body. He hoped the grandfather would take pity on him and give him another body. The creator heard his prayer and told Vasishtha to enter into the vital energy of the gods Varuna and Mitra. The result was that Vasishtha's second birth was not from the womb of any female, but from a water pot, into which the vital energy of the gods was discharged.[1] Nimi by the kind co-operation of some rishis, gained the favour of the gods, and he was allowed to live in their eyes. Eventually he had a son born to him, in a manner contrary to nature. This son was called Janaka, the founder of the family of Mithilā, and first king of Videha.

By the time Rāma had told these two stories as well as another about Yayāti a son of Nahusha,[2] the

[1] Agastya himself, the narrator of this incident, was born at the same time from the seed of the gods. It is impossible to repeat the obscene and repulsive narrative, in which Urvāsi, one of the celestial courtezans, was involved. Urvāsi, cursed to dwell with mortals, married the king of Kāshi, and was the grandmother of Nahusha, mentioned in the next paragraph.

[2] Yayāti had two wives, and two sons called Yadu and Puru. Because of the way in which he neglected Yadu's mother, his father-in-law cursed him to endure the 'infirmities of old age.' Yayāti was very distressed at being deprived of the power to enjoy himself and he asked Yadu to transfer his youth and strength to him. Yadu replied that he had better ask Puru, his other son, to do so. He did not see why after both he and his mother had been so neglected, he should be asked to make such a sacrifice. Yayāti was very angry and cursed his son for his disobedience, with the result that he became a Rākshasa and the father of Rākshasas. He then went to his favourite son Puru, who at once agreed to his father's request. Thus re-endowed with strength and vigour, Yayāti continued to reign for thousands of years, and celebrated thousands of sacrifices. He finally gave back to his son Puru the youth that he had borrowed and after installing him in the kingdom retired to the forest. There also he lived a long time before going to heaven. The story of Yayāti will also be found in *Summary of the Mahābhārata*, p. 33, where it is said that Yayāti was cast out of heaven by Indra for boasting that nobody had ever equalled him in ascetic merit. According to the *Mahābhārata*, Yadu was an ancestor of Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu. Puru was the ancestor of the Pāndus. But it does not mention the curse uttered against Yadu. It would be too great a reflection on the god Krishna to suggest that he was descended from a Rākshasa.

first streaks of dawn appeared in the east, and Lakshmana did not get an opportunity of going to the gate of the palace to find out if any one wished to see the king. With the new day, however, there was no further delay. As soon as the morning rites had been performed, Rāma seated himself upon his throne, and with the assistance of his ministers, including Kashyapa and Vasishtha, proceeded to the transaction of public business. Lakshmana was once more asked to go to the palace gate and enquire if any one wanted to see the king. But there was nobody, as far as he could see. For everyone in Rāma's kingdom was prosperous and happy. There was no disease and no poverty. Death never occurred among the young or those of middle age; none, but the very old, ever died. And so Lakshmana came back and said that there was nobody. But Rāma told him to go again and make sure. When he went a second time, the prince noticed a dog waiting at the gate. The animal was turning its eyes in every direction and barking. When Lakshmana saw that the animal evidently was in distress, he asked it what was wrong, and if it had any message for the king. The dog replied that it wanted to speak to Rāma but unfortunately, being a dog and one of the vilest of creatures, it could not enter a king's palace. When Rāma heard what the dog said, he gave orders for its immediate admission.[1] As the animal entered his presence, the king told it to speak freely and not to be afraid. The dog at once began a long discourse on the greatness of virtue, the power of kings, and in particular, the splendid example which Rāma set before his subjects.[2] When the dog had been asked a

A dog appeals to Rama for justice

[1] The dog said, 'We cannot enter into the houses of divinities, kings and Brāhmins, nor can we enter where there is fire, Indra, the sun or the wind, for we are the vilest born; so I cannot enter there.' Dutt's Translation, p. 1750.

[2] This canto (71) says that the dog's head had been cut off. 'Thereupon, beholding Rāma, the dog, having his head cut off, said, 'The king is the protector of animals and their lord. The king is awake when his subjects are asleep, and he protects them. Without his shelter his subjects meet with destruction. There is nothing like virtue, hard to acquire in this world. Charity, kindness, honouring the pious and innocent conduct, constitute the chief virtues. For by these the well-being of this life and the next is brought about. Thou art like an ocean, the refuge of all virtues.' Dutt. p. 1751.

second time to say what it wanted, it proceeded to accuse a Brāhmin beggar of assault. The Brāhmin was at once sent for and asked what he had to say in reply. Before he had an opportunity of doing so, however Rāma gave him a lecture on the evil results that flowed from anger. It stole away all that a man acquired by asceticism, sacrifices and gifts. It was highly necessary for men to kill anger. For human passions ran 'amuck on all sides' like unbridled steeds. The Brāhmin at once pleaded guilty to the charge, but in extenuation of his conduct said that he had tramped all day from door to door, seeking charity and finding none. Hungry and tired he saw the dog lying in the middle of the road. [1] More than once he asked it to get up and move to one side. It paid no attention at first, and when it did get up eventually with great reluctance, it stood and growled at him. It was then that he lost his temper and struck the dog. But he was willing to submit to any punishment the king in his wisdom chose to inflict. He knew that the receipt of punishment would rescue him from hell. Rāma before giving sentence asked his ministers what, in their opinion, would be a suitable punishment for such a crime as the Brāhmin had committed. They were all agreed that a Brāhmin must not be put to death, but preferred that the king himself should award the sentence. For as they said, Rāma was the eternal Vishnu, the chastiser of the three worlds. Before the king could say anything, the dog interrupted and said he would like to award the punishment himself, and the punishment he proposed was that the Brāhmin should be made the head of a family. The royal ministers were greatly amazed at this proposal and told the dog that it was a boon and not a punishment he was conferring on the Brāhmin. [2] But the dog said he knew what he was asking. He himself had been the head of

1 This picture of a hungry Brahmin unable to obtain charity hardly agrees with the picture of ideal happiness presented elsewhere.

2 The ministers mentioned on this occasion include, in addition to Kashyapa and Vasishtha, Bhrigu and Angiras.

a family, during a former existence. He had been devoted to the worship of gods and Brāhmins, was entirely devoid of sin, kind to animals and of a humble and gentle disposition, and yet they saw how he had fallen. As for the Brāhmin, he was an ill-natured, cruel, impatient and impious fellow and he would never be able to perform the responsible duties of a householder. The result would be inevitable. He would bring ruin upon himself and upon his ancestors and his descendants, for seven generations, both up and down.[1] Rāma was greatly interested in these and other observations on the part of the dog, and gazed at it with open-eyed wonder. Eventually the dog went away, but it is said that it retired to a place called Vārānasi, where it spent the remainder of its life in the practice of asceticism.

An owl and a vulture appeal to Rama

At this point another story is introduced about an owl and a vulture. They had quarrelled over the ownership of a nest and agreed to submit their case to Rāma. When they entered his presence, the vulture spoke first. He assured the king that he was the foremost of celestials and Asuras, the preserver of mankind, endowed with the patience of the earth and the velocity of the wind, as beautiful as the moon, as learned as Brihaspati, with a great deal more of the same kind. The owl, when her opportunity came, told Rāma that while ordinary kings were portions of the sun and moon, Indra, Yama and Kuvera, they were human beings after all, but he was the omnipotent deity Nārāyana, as well as, if not superior to, the deities mentioned above. When asked to state their case, the vulture said the nest had always been his, while the owl said that she had been ousted from it by the vulture. The king resolved that the best thing to

[1] Whenever the boon was granted, it is said that the Brāhmin being thus honoured and pleased, and ascending an elephant, proceeded to occupy his new and dignified station. (See Dutt. p. 1753). Both the *Laws of Manu* and the *Mahābhārata* speak in praise of the life of the householder being greater than the other three stages of a Brāhmin's life, namely, student, hermit and ascetic.

do would be to go and see the nest for himself. He therefore went to the place where it was, travelling in the aeroplane Pushpaka, and accompanied by his ministers. The nest was carefully examined, and when the birds had been submitted to cross-examination, the owl said she had lived in it since the creation of the world, while the vulture claimed that it had been his since the birth of the first man. There was not much to choose between these two statements. But after the ministers had been solemnly adjured to speak the truth they unanimously arrived at the conclusion—it is not explained how—that the owl was speaking the truth and that the vulture was a liar. They therefore requested the king to award a suitable punishment to the guilty bird. They added the observation that punishment was exceedingly beneficial as it saved the culprit from 'the fear of hell,' and caused him to 'reach a *better state*.'[1] Before the king had time to sentence the vulture, a voice from heaven said he must not take the vulture's life. The voice went on to explain that in a former life the vulture was a pious king of the name of Brahmadatta. One day a high-souled Brāhmin, named Gautama, came to his palace and said that he intended to accept of his hospitality for a hundred years. Brahmadatta was delighted and, after washing the Brāhmin's feet, proceeded to get food ready for him. Unhappily some flesh was mixed in the food, and the ascetic in his anger uttered a curse

[1] To enable his ministers to come to a true decision Rāma reminded them of what was said in the *Purānas* about the creation. Formerly the sun, moon and stars, the earth, in fact, the three worlds, were all under water. 'At that time only Nārāyana existed, as the second Sumeru.' In Nārāyana's belly was stationed the earth with Lakshmi. Having destroyed creation and entered water, the highly effulgent Vishnu, identical with the soul of creatures, lay asleep there for many long years. Seeing Vishnu asleep Brahmā entered his belly. A golden lotus at once sprang from Vishnu's navel, and from the navel Brahmā arose. Brahmā became engaged in penance, with a view to creating earth, air, trees, mountains, men, reptiles and all kinds of animals. It is said that two demons called Madhu and Kaitabha came out of Nārāyana's ears, and attacked Brahmā. Brahmā, here called the self-born, raised a loud cry for help. Vishnu came to his help and slew the demons. But the earth was deluged with their blood. In order to purify the earth, Vishnu (here called Hari) covered it with trees and drugs (See Dutt, p. 1758, from which I have largely quoted). How this story enabled Rāma to conclude that the nest belonged to the owl is not explained, but he said it did.

against the king and changed him into a vulture. When the king pointed out that what he had done, had been done in ignorance, Gautama relented so far as to say that when a king of the name of Rāma would be born in the race of Ikshvāku, his touch would free him from the curse. Hearing this voice from the skies Rāma placed his hand upon the vulture. An immediate change took place and Brahmadatta, freed from his vulture shape, stood forth in all his pristine beauty, 'smeared with celestial perfumes.' The emancipated king was very grateful to Rāma and thanked him most heartily for delivering him from such a dreadful curse.

Ascetics appeal for Rama's help

A few months after the events just recorded, more than a hundred ascetics, whose home was on the banks of the Jumna, paid a visit to Ayodhyā. They brought with them, in addition to gifts of fruit, vessels full of water drawn from all the sacred lakes and streams. Rāma reverently welcomed the ascetics to his palace and caused them to sit on golden seats in accordance with their rank. He then, with joined hands, asked them to say what he could do for them. He would obey without question any command they chose to give. His whole empire, his life itself, were always at the disposal of such mighty saints. The twice-born sages were greatly pleased with this generous speech. They said their experience had been that kings carefully enquired what anyone wanted before promising to do anything. They were confident, however, that one who was so zealous for the comfort and benefit of Brāhmins would achieve their object. They confessed that they were about to ask him to perform a very difficult task. They had appealed for help to a great many different persons. But the hero who overcame and slew Rāvana and his followers would be able to defeat and slay the powerful and wicked Asura, who had caused so much havoc in the hermitages of the west. Their story was to the following effect: In the Krita age, there was an Asura called Madhu, a favourite of the gods and a friend of

Brāhmins. Shiva[1] was so pleased with him that he gave him the present of one of his own darts. When he made the gift, Shiva declared that it would remain Madhu's property so long as he did not attack gods and Brāhmins. When the Asura asked that the dart might become a permanent possession in his family, Shiva answered that it was impossible to make such a promise, but he made the concession that one of his sons should continue to possess it after their father's death and also be invincible in battle. Unfortunately, Lavana, the son of Madhu, was very different from his father. He lived a very sinful wicked life, which was a great source of grief to Madhu, though he never attempted to rebuke him. When Madhu died, the dart came into the possession of this wicked son, and he at once began to oppress the three worlds. He found special pleasure in persecuting the ascetics, thousands of whom he had killed and eaten.

Shatrughna kills a demon

When he had heard this pathetic story Rāma gave the immediate promise that Lavana would be put to death. The question at once arose as to which of Rāma's brothers should undertake the task. Both Shatrughna and Bharata wished to go and punish Lavana. But when Shatrughna pointed out that Bharata had had enough of worry during Rāma's absence in the forest, it was decided that Shatrughna should be sent. Rāma also announced that when the prince had conquered Madhuvan, the 'graceful city of Madhu,' he would appoint him as king over not only the city but the surrounding provinces.[2] Before setting out, Shatrughna received a wonderful arrow from Rāma. It was the very arrow with which Vishnu Nārāyana slew the two

[1] This god is called in succession, Rudra, Mahādeva and Shiva. They are of course all names for the same deity, though Rudra is the oldest. He is also called Nīlkantha (blue throat) in this passage.

[2] Eventually Rāma changed his mind and before leaving home Shatrughna was installed as king of a country which he had not yet seen. Rāma said that those, who conquered a country and did not furnish it with a king, went to hell, also that a younger brother must always obey an elder brother (See Dutt, p. 1764). Sumitrā, Kaikeyi and others were present at Shatrughna's coronation.

demons, Madhu and Kaitabha, who issued from his ears at the creation of the world. Rāma had it with him at the siege of Lankā, but he had not used it because of the great injury it might do to the world. But Shatrughna must employ it in his fight with Lavana. There was no other weapon in the whole world that would be of any avail. And even it would be shot in vain, should Lavana have in his hands the dart which his father got from Shiva. It would be Shatrughna's business therefore to attack Lavana when the dart was not in his possession. Māhadeva was so powerful that there was no other way of slaying Lavana.[1] When Shatrughna and his army reached the demon's capital, a great battle ensued. The prince successfully contrived that Lavana should not have the dart of Shīvā in his possession when the duel between them took place. In these circumstances the result was a foregone conclusion. Pierced to the heart Lavana fell to the earth like a mountain struck by a thunderbolt. The arrow of Vishnu made a great impression on gods, demons, Gandharvas and saints. Indeed they went to Brahmā and told him that they were afraid that it would cause the destruction of the universe. Brahmā however said that they need not be alarmed. Vishnu knew its power and was able to control it. And, as they knew, Shatrughna was a *part of Vishnu.* When the battle was over and the prince had received the congratulations of the gods, the work of building a new capital was at

[1] The last sentence in this canto (67) reads, 'It is impossible to surpass the prowess of the graceful Nīlkantha.' Shiva obtained the name of Nīlkantha the blue throat for the services he rendered at the churning of the ocean. See the description of that event in the first book. One of Rāma's predecessors on the throne of Ayodhyā, Māndhata, had already fought with Lavana, but the dart of Shiva had reduced him and his army to ashes. Māndhāta was a very famous warrior. He conquered the whole earth, and resolved to conquer heaven as well. The gods were greatly alarmed, but when he claimed the lordship of heaven, they cunningly told him that there was one enemy on earth whom he had not subdued. When he had defeated him, they would willingly surrender the throne of heaven. They of course referred to Lavana, Māndhāta accordingly returned to the earth in search of Lavana. He was slain, as we have said, and the gods were delivered from further worry. The rishi Bhrigu told this story to Shatrughna as he was on his way to fight with Lavana (c. 80.)

once begun. It received the name of Surashenā,[1] and took twelve years to build. It stood on the banks of the Jumna, a large and spacious city, full of handsome houses, shops and yards, inhabited by tradesmen and merchants who had come from various countries and settled there. When the twelve years were accomplished, Shatrughna paid a visit to Ayodhyā, which he reached after a journey of seven days. He was so happy in the enjoyment of Rāma's society that he declared that he had no desire to return and reign in his new kingdom. This is how he expressed his feelings: 'Without thee, I cannot live for ever in a foreign province, like a motherless child.' Realizing the affection that prompted this utterance, Rāma took his brother in his arms and kissed him. But he pointed out that Shatrughna was using language unworthy of a Kshatriya. It was his duty to return and govern his subjects. But there was no reason why he should not pay occasional visits to Ayodhyā. Shatrughna yielded with reluctance to Rāma's advice, and at the end of seven days set out for Surashenā.

The birth of Rama's sons

It is necessary at this stage to record the birth of Rāma's two sons, Kusha and Lava, in the hermitage of Vālmīki. On his way to fight with the Asura Lavana, Shatrughna spent a a night with Vālmīki. At midnight, messengers came and told the saint that Sītā had given birth to twin boys. Greatly delighted at the news, Vālmīki went at once to see them. They looked like gods. To protect them from the attacks of 'ghosts and goblins' Vālmīki gave the upper part of some grass called *Kusha* to some elderly women who were present and told them to rub the body of the older boy with it. He then took the lower part of the grass called *Lava* and told them to rub the younger boy in the same way. The grass was of course rendered holy by the repetition of verses from the sacred books. The saint next announced that he would henceforth call the first boy, *Kusha* and the second, *Lava*, names by which

[1] In a later canto the poem refers to this city as Mathurā (or Madhurā),

they would be famous throughout the world in later days.[1] Shatrughna was duly informed that his sister-in-law had given birth to twin sons. He was very pleased to learn the news and to listen to the ascetics as they chanted Rāma's praise. But apparently no attempt was made to inform Rāma that he had been at last blessed with heirs to his throne.[2]

The death of a Brahmin boy

Some days after Shatrughna had returned to his capital on the banks of the Jumna, an aged Brāhmin arrived at the palace gate in Ayodhyā, bringing with him the dead body of his son, a lad of fourteen years. Overwhelmed with grief, the old man cried aloud and asked what sin he had committed in a former birth, that he should be visited with this great calamity. So far as he could remember, he had never told a lie, never injured any creature, never been guilty of any sort of crime. Except under the rule of Rāma, he had never seen or heard of a boy dying at such an early age. He therefore placed the blame on Rāma's shoulders. In other kingdoms 'boys had no fear of such an untimely death.'[3] He therefore demanded that Rāma should restore his son to life. If he did not, the king would

[1] See Dutt. p. 1772.

[2] On his way home to Ayodhyā after his twelve years' absence, Shatrughna once more spent a night at the hermitage of Vālmiki. When the evening meal was over, the prince 'listened to themes relating to Rāma. They were composed in Sanskrit and set to the tune of a musical instrument.' Shatrughna was beside himself with joy and his eyes were full of tears.' His followers asked where they were and felt as if it were a dream. They wanted Shatrughna to question the ascetic about this wonderful poem, but the prince said it would not be proper. Sītā's name does not seem to have been mentioned. Nor are we told about Kusha and Lava, who must have been in the hermitage, and were by this time twelve years old.

[3] 'Forsooth Rāma has perpetrated a mighty iniquity for which boys during his administration have been meeting with untimely death.' (See Dutt's trans. p. 1787). This is in strange contrast to what we read in other parts of the sixth and seventh books. The father also complained that the boy had died without performing a son's duties to parents, and said that he and his wife would sit down and die at the palace gate. This is the practice of *Dharnā* referred to in the *Laws of Manu*, in which a person starves himself to death at the door of an enemy. It is forbidden by the *Indian Penal Code*. For interesting accounts of how it was employed in recent times, see Broughton's *Letters from a Mahratta Camp*. p, 31 and Mrs. Fay's *Letters from India*, No. XX.

be guilty of a Brāhmin's death and of bringing distress upon his subjects by reason of his wicked rule. Rāma was greatly distressed as he listened to the old man's threats. He sent for Vasiṣhtha, Vāmadeva, Nārada, his brothers and others of his councillors and asked them what he was to do.[1] Nārada was the first to speak. He said he would tell the king why the boy had died before his time. When Rāma had heard his statement he could take what he considered to be the best course in the circumstances. In the Krita-yuga, or first of the four ages, the Brāhmins, who were the highest caste, alone engaged in the practice of asceticism, and in consequence were endowed with great glory, were free from ignorance, and never died. Towards the close of this, the golden age, however, the intelligence of Brāhmins began to slacken, and with the coming of the Tretā-yuga or second age of the world, the Kshatriyas began to practise austerities with the result that they rose to a level with the Brāhmins. It was for this reason that Manu and other religious leaders of the time composed the Shāstra describing and setting forth the four divisions of castes. During this second age, Vaishyas and Shudras confined themselves to their proper duty in life, namely, serving the other two castes. They recognized that this was the *greatest piety* they could perform. This applied specially to the Shudras, whose '*highest religion*' was to serve people of all *Varnas*.[2] The same process of deterioration as had been observed in the golden age was seen in this age also. Falsehood and other sins began to show, and the lives of men were shortened because of their sins. With the coming of the Dwāpara age, sin which had already advanced one foot of impiety now put forth her other foot. Wickedness grew more widespread, and Vaishyas began to practise asceticism. The three ages had thus witnessed

[1] Kashyapa, Javāli, Gautama and Mārkandeya were among the others. The *Mahābhārata* says that Mārkandeya had witnessed many dissolutions of the universe. See *Summary*, pp. 5, 64, 85, 149.

[2] The reader will remember that *Varna* (or *colour*) is the Sanskrit word which is expressed in English as caste.

the three castes engaged in ascetic rites. But it had never been heard of that a Shudra should do so. It was considered most improper for a member of this degraded caste to have any share in such high matters. He knew that in Kali Yugá or fourth age, it would be different.[1] Having made this statement, Nārada then informed the king that the Brāhmin boy had died because somewhere within the confines of Rāma's empire a single Shudra had begun to practise asceticism. It was Rāma's duty to see that this wickedness was stopped. Kings obtained a sixth part of all that their subjects possessed, not only of their wealth, but of their asceticism and good deeds. But it was on the understanding that they governed with justice and shielded the country from harm. If they failed to do so, they went to hell with those who had disturbed the peace and prosperity of their fellow citizens.

Rama kills a Shudra ascetic

When he had heard these wise words, Rāma instructed his brother Lakshmana to place the dead body of the twice born youth in a jar of oil, and to administer comfort to the heart-broken parents. For himself, he mounted his air chariot, Pushpaka, and went everywhere in search of the Shudra who had dared to engage in the practice of asceticism. He went first to the west, then to the north and east, and nowhere did he find the smallest speck of sin. But when he examined the south, he found, near a tank by the side of a mountain, an ascetic hanging head downwards. Rāma approaching him said he was only asking the question out of curiosity, but he would like very much to know in what caste he had been born, and why he was practising such severe asceticism. If he would tell the truth, he would

[1] In the Kali Yuga asceticism shall be established among Shudras (Dutt. p. 1790). Despite the use of the future tense one feels that the speaker realizes that the fourth age has begun. At any rate he acknowledges that the third age has been well established, despite the fact that in a later canto, the poem speaks of Rāma as living in the Tretā or second age. 'Oh king, even in the Dwāpara (third age) devout penances for Shudras *were* considered as impiety, what to speak of the Tretā age' (p. 1790). This sentence adds to the confusion.

be 'crowned with auspiciousness' The ascetic at once replied that he would not tell a lie. He was hoping to reach heaven 'with his body' and he was born a Shudra. Whenever the ascetic uttered these words, Rāma drew his sword and cut off his head.[1] The gods were very pleased with the king for performing such a 'godlike work.' They rained down flowers, and sang Rāma's praises again and again. They also said that as a result of dying at Rāma's hands, the Shudra ascetic would gain admission to heaven. Before they returned to their own celestial abodes, the king asked the gods to grant him a favour. He said that he had promised the Brāhmin that his boy would be restored to life, and he did not wish to be 'made a liar.' Indra of the thousand eyes told him not to worry. The boy was already restored to his father, mother and friends.

Rama visits Agastya

On his way home from this encounter Rāma paid a visit to Agastya, whose hermitage, the reader will remember, was situated in the south of India. Agastya is here called *Kumbhayoni*, because of the fact that he was born from a water pot. The two friends were very glad to see one another, and the rishi entertained the king by telling him a number of old world tales. One of them is of sufficient interest to earn repetition here. In the golden age, before the days of kings, the people went to Brahmā and asked for a king. Seeing the gods had Indra to rule over them, they thought they ought to have some one to whom they could look as the foremost among men. They were so firm about it that they told Brahmā they would not live without a king. In reply to these urgent pleadings, Brahmā sent for his fellow deities and asked them to give him a portion of their respective energies. The Patriarch then made a sound or *Khshupa*, and from this sound there arose a king to whom he give the name

1 The first six books do not show such contempt for the Shudra or the out-caste. One remembers with gratitude that Rāma took Guha, king of the Nishādas in his arms. And we have Dasharatha's story of the boy who was the son of a mixed marriage and practising asceticism in the forest.

of *Khshupa*.[1] 'In his person Brahmā placed in equal proportions the energies of the gods.' By means of Indra's energy, the newly created king was able to bring the earth under his control; by means of the energy of Kuvera the god of wealth, 'he conferred riches upon his subjects; and by that of Yama, he governed them.' As a result of telling this story, Agastya was able to persuade Rāma to accept the present of a beautiful celestial ornament. The king had refused it on the ground that, while it was the duty of the Brāhmins to receive gifts, it was most reprehensible for Kshatriyas to do so. When Rāma asked the saint to allow him to depart for Ayodhyā, he promised to pay him another visit, saying 'I shall come again some other time to free myself from sins.' But Agastya replied, 'O Rāma, these words are highly wonderful. Thou art the purifier of all creatures. One who beholds thee even for a moment becomes pure and worthy of repairing to heaven. Even the leading deities worship him. Those on earth, who cast dreadful looks on thee, are immediately brought under the control of Yama and are constrained to go to hell. People become perfect even if they only chant thy glories.[2]

The power of the horse-sacrifice

When he got back to Ayodhyā, Rāma announced to his three brothers that it was his intention to celebrate the Rājasūya sacrifice. The performance of this sacrifice carries with it the assertion on the part of the celebrant that he claims universal dominion. Bharata, therefore, asked what purpose such a sacrifice would serve. The performance of the sacrifice had involved many royal houses in ruin and disaster. It roused the anger and opposition of other kings. Rāma was already recognized as the refuge of all creatures and of the whole universe. Nevertheless, if he did perform it, the inevitable result would be

[1] Dutt's translation. p. 1795.

[2] Dutt's translation, p. 1804. This is the nearest approach to the language of devotion addressed to Rāma, which we find in such abundance in the *Rāmāyan* of Tulsidās.

anger and hostility. Rāma at once accepted Bharata's wise advice, and it was finally resolved that the horse-sacrifice would be of much greater use. It was said to be the best of all, as it cleansed those who celebrated it from every sin. Lakshmana supported this view by telling a story which is recorded in the Purānas. There was a very great and pious Asura of the name of Vitra. This Asura was two thousand miles high and seven hundred miles broad. His piety and asceticism so alarmed the gods that they asked Vishnu to destroy him. That deity however refused in view of the fact that he had lived on terms of friendship with Vitra for many years. But he agreed to impart his energy to Indra if that god would undertake the task of slaying the demon. Indra at once agreed and, with his thunderbolt, killed Vitra when he was engaged in penance. This was a terrible blunder, To kill anyone while he was practising asceticism was equivalent to killing a Brāhmin. When the deed was done, Indra realized the enormity of his sin, and fled to the other side of the world and hid himself in Lokāloka,[1] a place shrouded in eternal darkness. His fellow deities were greatly distressed and went to Vishnu once more. They pointed out that it was really Vishnu who had killed the pious Asura, because it was by virtue of Vishnu's energy that Indra had been able to do the deed. Calling him the excellent Purusha,[2] they therefore told him that he must devise some plan whereby Indra would be delivered from the sin of Brāhminicide. Vishnu replied that that could be accomplished if Indra would celebrate the horse-

[1] Lokāloka means *A world and no world.* 'It is,' says Dowson, 'a fabulous belt of mountains bounding the outermost of the seven seas and dividing the visible world from the regions of darkness.' It is said that there seven island continents stretched out from Mount Meru, as their centre, and each surrounded by a sea. Lokāloka was thus beyond the last known land. The *sea of milk* of which we read was the sixth of these seas,

[2] *Purusha* or *man*, in the *Upanishads*, means 'the all pervading self-existent spirit.' In the *Laws of Manu*, the term is used for three beings: (*a*) Brahmā; (*b*) the male formed by Brahmā from half of his own body; and (*c*) Virāj, the offspring of the female half of Brahma's body. See Muir's O.S.T. vol. i p. 36. In the Sānkhya philosophy, *Purusha* stands for the *personal soul.*

sacrifice. The universe had suffered dreadfully from the absence of its governor. No rain fell. The rivers dried up. Even the trees of the forest began to wither. But when the celestials had found Indra, and, with him, engaged in the horse-sacrifice, a wonderful change took place. The sin of which he had been guilty issued out of Indra's person, and said she would leave the god if they made arrangements for her disposal. The gods did so. The sin was divided into four parts. One part dwelt in rivers during the rainy season; another in *saline soil*; a third part in proud young women three days each month; and the fourth in those who killed innocent Brāhmins. Once Indra was freed and installed upon his throne, the universe was delivered from all its troubles.[1]

Rama performs the horse-sacrifice

There was no doubt whatever left in the minds of the brothers that there was no sacrifice to equal the Ashvamedha. And preparations for its observance were at once begun. Vāmadeva, Javāli and Kashyapa were taken into consultation. They all expressed their high approval and assisted in the choice of a black horse that had all the marks calculated to make the sacrifice a success. Messengers were sent to invite not only rishis, Brāhmins and tributary kings, but the rulers of foreign countries as well, who were on friendly terms with Rāma. Sugriva and Vibhishan were also asked to be present. The place chosen for sacrifice was on the banks of the Gomati river to which millions of beasts carried great stores of rice,

[1] When Lakshmana had told this story, Rāma proceeded to tell another, about a high souled king called Ila, who 'convulsed the three worlds with terror.' The gods and demons used to worship him perpetually. He also slew millions of animals. Ila once entered a forest where Shiva and Umā were. To please his wife Shiva had caused all male animals and trees, in that region where he was, to assume the female form. Ila and his followers suffered like the rest. But by the kindness of the god when Ila prayed to him the concession was granted that for a month he should be a woman, and for a month a man. It is a long story, but it is enough to say that when he was a woman, the rishi Buddha cohabited with Ila, and he gave birth to a son, called Pururāva. Eventually Ila's father intervened and, as a result of celebrating the horse sacrifice, Ila was rewarded by the permanent recovery of his manhood. It is said that Vashatkāra and the highly effulgent Omkāra assisted at this sacrifice (See Dutt. pp. 1895–98).

beans, peas, pulse, salt, oil, clarified butter, and vast quantities of silver and gold coins. Shops also were opened for the benefit of the citizens, who, with their wives and children flocked to the scene. For the entertainment of the guests, actors, dancers, cooks and young women were employed in large numbers. Bharata and Shatrughna attended to the royal guests; Vibhishan looked after the rishis, and Sugriva the Brāhmins. The sacrifice lasted for twelve months, during which time untold wealth, including land, houses, food, clothes and money, was distributed. The cry of 'Give, give,' was heard on every hand, and the almoners went on distributing as long as any body was willing to receive. Indeed, before they had time to speak, beggars, monkeys and Rākshasas had presents thrust upon them. Everybody said that they had never witnessed such a profusion of wealth even at the sacrifices of the gods. As has been said, the sacrifice lasted for a year, and Rāma went on giving all the time. Neverthless he had more wealth at the end of the year than when it began.

Rama's sons sing before him

Among those who came to witness the sacrifice of the horse was Vālmīki, from his hermitage beyond the Ganges. He brought with him Lava and Kusha, and told the boys to go and sing the 'whole *Rāmāyana*'[1] wherever they found people gathered together. He added that if Rāma invited them to go to the palace and sing, they were not to be in the least afraid. Should any question be asked as to their parentage, they were to reply that they were the disciples of the high-souled Vālmīki. In due course, the king heard of the lads and called them to his presence. Naturally, Rāma listened with very great interest to a poem which told the story of his own great deeds. Large numbers of people were present at the time, and as they looked at the two boys, everyone was struck at the likeness they

[1] We have already seen that when Shatrughna spent a night at Vālmīki's hermitage, he and his soldiers had been greatly impressed by hearing a poem with Rāma as its theme.

bore to Rāma. It was the universal opinion that, if it had not been for the matted hair and coats of bark, nobody could have told the difference. When twenty sections of the first book had been recited, Rāma was so pleased with the performance that he asked Lakshmana to give them eighteen thousand gold coins and anything else they might ask for. But the boys refused to take any gift, saying that dwellers in the woods had no need of gold. When Rāma, greatly surprised at their refusal, asked who was the author of the poem they had sung, they answered that it was Vālmīki, and that the whole work consisted of twenty-four thousand slokas, in six books. Should he wish to hear them recite it all from beginning to end, they were at his service. Rāma at once said that such was his pleasure with the result that day after day, he listened to his own endless story, surrounded by ascetics, kings and monkeys.

As the poem advanced, Rāma gradually realized that the boys who stood before him were Sītā's children.[1]

Sita is sent for

And a messenger was sent to Vālmīki with a communication of the greatest import. He wished to learn from the ascetic's own lips if Sītā had lived a pure life in the forest and, should testimony be given, arrange that Sītā herself give proofs of her innocence. When Vālmīki received this message, he said at once that the king's commands would be obeyed. A woman's husband was her greatest god. Sītā would not fail. Rāma was greatly pleased when he received this reply. He told the assembled rishis and kings that his wife would come and give proofs of her innocence in open assembly. The rishis complimented the hero on his noble action. They said that nobody else would do such a thing.

[1] We have here fresh proof that Shatrughna never told Rāma of the birth of Sītā's sons on the night that he stayed at Vālmīki's hermitage. But it looks as if Kusha and Lava had some knowledge of their parentage. They were twelve years of age at this time.

The trial was fixed for the following day. Great crowds gathered to witness the imposing spectacle. [1]

Sita at the bar of judgement

Everyone was deeply moved and sat absolutely motionless as Sītā appeared on the sacrificial ground accompanied by Vālmīki. She advanced with downcast head, her hands folded together, her eyes full of tears, *meditating upon Rāma*. Suddenly the silence gave place to a great shout of admiration and pity. Some praised Rāma some praised Sītā, others praised both. Vālmīki was the first to speak, and testified not only to Sitā's purity, but to the fact that Kusha and Lava were Rāma's own sons. He swore that he was speaking the truth and, if he was telling a lie, hoped that he would lose the merit he had acquired in penance practised during many thousand years. To this statement Rāma answered that he was quite sure Vālmīki was speaking the truth; nevertheless he felt it necessary that Sītā herself should produce proof as to her chastity. Before they left Lankā the gods themselves had intervened and given the most satisfactory assurances. But the people had slandered her since, and in consequence he had been forced to send her away. He was quite sure the boys were his. But for his own satisfaction, he must repeat his request for a personal testimony on Sītā's part. By this time the celestials had learned of what was going on, and they appeared in large numbers with Brahmā at their head.[2] With the coming of the gods, a most remarkable change in the atmosphere was felt. A delightfully cool heavenly breeze sprang up. People said there never had been anything like it in the Tretā age. It was the kind of wind that blew in the age of gold.[3]

[1] The Rākshasas and monkeys were there out of curiosity, says the poet. Durvāsa of whom we shall hear later, Bharadvāja, Nārada, Kashyapa and Pulastya were some of the rishis and Prajāpatis present. 'Thousands and thousands of Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras and Brāhmins also came to witness Sītā's trial. Dutt. p. 1908 (1838).

[2] They were the Adityas, Vasus, Rudras, Visvādevas, Maruts, Sādhyas, Siddhas, Nagas and Rishis. Dutt p. 1910 (1830).

[3] Here it is definitely said that this wind was blowing in the Tretā age or second age of the world, which may or may not be accepted as a proof that Rāma lived at that time.

It was then that Sītā stood forth. Looking at the assembled multitude in the face, she said, 'I have never thought of any other person in my mind but Rāma; by the strength of this virtue, let the goddess Vasundharā give me room. I have always with my mind, body and words prayed for Rāma's well-being, and by virtue thereof may the goddess Vasundharā give me room in her womb.' Immediately the earth opened. Serpent-deities, bearing a beautiful throne upon their heads, appeared and the goddess Vasundharā showed in the midst. Taking the poor princess in her arms she placed her on the throne, which sank into the earth and disappeared from view. The gods by their words of praise showed that they approved of what Sītā had done. But the multitude was more divided in opinion. Some cried aloud for joy, but others remained silent, while others not knowing what to think kept looking sometimes at Rāma and sometimes at Sītā.

Sita appeals to the earth to cover her

As for Rāma himself, he was plunged in grief. His grief soon gave place to anger. And he swore that if *the earth* did not restore Sītā to his arms, he would submerge her with all her mountains and forests beneath the waves. He had brought Sītā back from Lankā. He was resolved that he would bring her back from hell. [1] But Brahmā intervened and asked him to control himself. He should remember who he was, the god Vishnu. Sītā had gone to the land of the Nāgas and he would meet her again in heaven. He therefore urged him to restrain his grief. He had already listened to Vālmīki's poem, describing the glorious deeds that he had performed. But there was more of the poem which he had not yet heard. He referred to the Uttarakānda, the last book of the poem, a work so

Rama Moans for Sita

[1] Pātāla is the word here used for hell. It was the dwelling place of the Nāgas or serpent-deities, who came to Sītā's help. It was the lowest of the seven hells. Daityas, Dānavas and Yakshas lived in the others. It is somewhat surprising to find Sītā going there. *Vasundharā* means *the earth*.

wonderful that only the greatest of the saints were worthy of listening to it. When he had offered these words of comfort and advice, Brahmā and the other deities went off to heaven. The rishis who lived in Brahmā's heaven, however, asked the god to let them wait and hear the Uttarakānda.[1] When the permission of the god had been obtained, it was arranged that Kusha and Lava should recite it before them on the following day. Rāma returned to his palace. He took his sons with him and spent the night mourning for Sītā.

Ten thousand years pass away

The next canto of the poem is very short, and tells us the story of ten thousand years in a few lines. To begin with, it records that Kusha and Lava recited, in the presence of the rishis, the last book of the *Rāmāyana;* that Rāma was overwhelmed with grief at the loss of Sītā, that he never married again, that he made a golden image of Sītā, and that he was engaged in the performance of many sacrifices. Indeed it is said that a thousand years were occupied in celebrating the horse-sacrifice over and over again. Other sacrifices are also spoken of including the *Gomedha* or sacrifice of the cow.[2] The deaths of Kaikeyi and Kausalyā are also recorded. Of Rāma's mother Kausalyā, it is said 'that she breathed her last surrounded by her sons and grandsons.' The canto closes with the words, 'In this wise, having performed many sacrifices and multiplied pieties, Rāma spent many thousand years in happiness.'[3]

[1] The Uttarakānda is the Sanskrit name for this, the seventh and last book of the *Rāmāyana*. One feels that there is rather too much effort to prove that Vālmīki is its author also, especially in the last sentence of the book, where we read, 'Prachetas son, Vālmiki composed this poem, conferring long life, together with the future story of the deity and the Uttarakānda. Even Brahmā admitted this.' See Dutt's Translation, p. 1923 (1853).

[2] The words in Dutt's translation are: 'he celebrated many horse-sacrifices . . . . numberless Gomedhas and various other sacrifices.' For similar references to the cow-sacrifice see *Summary of Mahābhārata*, pp. 18, 19, 35, 75, 165, 191, 196.

[3] See Dutt's Translation, p. 1914 (1834). As to the next three cantos, one

Time comes for Rama

When ten thousand years had thus passed away Time came to Ayodhyā in the guise of an ascetic and told Lakshmana, who was standing at the palace gate, that he wished to see Rāma. He was, he said, the ambassador of the great saint, Atibala, and had come on urgent business. When he was escorted to the royal presence, the king presented the usual offerings and caused him to sit on a throne of gold. But when Rāma asked him to declare the purpose of of his visit, the ascetic replied that the welfare of the gods demanded that their interview should be held in private. The strictest secrecy was necessary and should any one venture to intrude upon their privacy he must promise to put that person to death. Lakshmana was, accordingly, requested to send away the warder from the gate, and see to it that no one came near the room in which the two were seated. When these precautions had been taken, the ascetic, who so far had concealed his own name, announced that he himself was really Time and Rama's own son, born to him from the womb of Māyā, when, as the god Vishnu, he reigned in heaven.[1] And he was there that day as the ambassador of Brahmā, to remind him that the

feels that they are an interpolation. They tell us how Bharata conquered the kingdom of the Gandharvas and divided it between his two sons, Taksha and Pushkala. Their capital cities were Takshasila, and Pushkalavati. In the same way Lakshmana's two sons, Angada and Chandraketu, had each a kingdom secured for them. The Gandharvas lived near the Indus. Bharata slew thirty millions of them in battle. The fight lasted a week. The gods never saw anything like it. Of the kingdoms founded for Lakshmana's sons, one was in the north and another in the west. Both brothers spent a very short time with their sons in their newly acquired possessions. They preferred to live with Rāma, and 'did not experience any pain in consequence of separation from their sons.' *Takshasila* is *Taxila* and *Pushkalavati* is *Peukelaotis* of Alexander and the Greeks (See R. C. Dutt).

Takshasila, the remains of which have been carefully explored, was situated twenty miles to the north-west of Rawalpindi. It was Ambhi, its Rajah, who opened the gate of India, to the Greek conqueror Alexander the Great in 326 B.C. Pushkalavati, about fifteen miles to the north-east of Peshawar, yielded after a month's siege to the same invader. Takshasila probably means 'the city of cut stone.' See Sir John Marshall's *Taxila*. It is not unreasonable to suggest that Bharata's sons *Taksha* and *Pushkala* are eponymous heroes, created to account for the names of these two cities.

[1] *Māyā* means *illusion*, *deception*. It is sometimes spoken of as

years of his sojourn on earth had been accomplished, and that his fellow deities were awaiting his return to the upper world. If he desired to remain longer among men, however, he was to say so. But Brahmā thought it was his duty to send him word. In reply Rāma, addressing the messenger as his son, said he was very pleased to see him. He was ready to return to his proper abode and associate himself with the gods in all their undertakings. He had, indeed, been revolving that very question in his mind, when Time arrived.

Durvasa threatens Rama and his brothers

As they were thus talking together another ascetic appeared at the palace gate. He was no less a person than Durvāsa, the son of Atri, a very irritable creature with blood-red eyes. When he demanded immediate admission to the presence of Rāma, Lakshmana replied that the king was at that moment engaged in a very private interview with another ascetic and must not be disturbed. Durvāsa boiled over with wrath at this refusal and swore that, if Lakshmana did not go that very moment and inform the king, he would curse the four brothers with their sons and grandsons. Lakshmana was for a moment very much perplexed. But he saw that it was much better that he should perish, rather than that a curse should fall upon his race. He therefore entered the room where his brother and Time were seated and said that Durvāsa wanted to see the king. As their business was now really over, Rāma said good-bye to the ambassador of Brahmā, and went forth to greet the ascetic with folded hands. When asked what he wanted, Durvāsa replied that he had just completed a fast which had lasted a thousand years, and was naturally very hungry. He wished the king to give him as much food as possible. When he had been well fed with the most delightful and

personified in a female form of celestial origin, created for the purpose of beguiling some individual, or as the personification of the unreality of worldly things. See *Dowson* from which I quote. For *Māyā's* place in the philosophic systems see *Indian Wisdom*, pp. 83, 108, 140.

appetising food, the ascetic thanked the king and went off to his own place.[1]

Lakshmana goes to heaven

When the ascetic had gone Rāma suddenly remembered the words of Time. Lakshmana had broken in upon their privacy. Lakshmana must die. He was overwhelmed with grief, but Lakshmana told him not to be distressed. All that happened in this world was determined by what we had done in a former birth. 'Such is the course of time.' He must not hesitate. No feelings of affection should prevent him from fulfilling the condition under which the private interview was held. When Rāma had summoned his ministers and priests, they gave the same advice. Those who did not keep their promises went to hell. The prosperity and happiness of the three worlds rested on the observance of the moral law. It was better to endure the suffering that would be caused by separation from Lakshmana, than cause an injury to the universe. But Rāma did not slay his brother. He uttered against him words of renunciation, and explained that 'the pious hold that destruction and renunciation are all the same.' When this judgement had been uttered against him, Lakshmana, without returning to his own house, went straight to the banks of the Saraju river, where he rinsed his mouth and stood with folded palms. He then closed his mouth and nostrils in such a way that he could not breathe. Gods, Apsarases and rishis rained down flowers upon his head, and in a moment he had passed beyond the sight of all beholders, passed up into the skies. The gods were greatly delighted when the

[1] This bad tempered sage, Durvāsa, plays an equally unpleasant part in the *Mahābhārata*. According to that poem, Krishna, also an incarnation of Vishnu, omitted to wipe off some fragments of food which had fallen on the foot of the sage. For this neglect Krishna was cursed to die from a wound in the foot. He was Krishna's guest at the time. It was Durvāsa's curse also that separated Shakuntalā from her husband and so weakened Indra in his age-long contest with the demons that, according to one story, the gods had to churn the ocean, and thereby obtain Amrit, with a view to renewing their strength. Durvāsa was a grandson of the god Brahmā.

fourth part of Vishnu arrived in heaven, and they approached him in the attitude of devotion.[1]

Rama prepares to leave this world.

The thought that he had forsaken Lakshmana was more than Rāma could endure, and he told 'the citizens and ministers' that he would place Bharata on the throne and return to the woods that very day. But Bharata said he had no desire to rule, indeed he had no desire to go to heaven, unless he should continue to enjoy his brother's society. The right thing to do was to divide the kingdom of Koshala into two, and make Lava and Kusha, kings of North and South Koshala, respectively. As for himself he would accompany Rāma to the forest, and he proposed that messengers be sent to Shatrughna to acquaint him with their resolve. The citizens next approached Rāma and asked him to allow them also to go with him to the forest. They were resolved to follow him with their wives and children, to follow him everywhere, to follow him anywhere. To the great joy of the people, Rāma consented to take them with him. He also installed Lava and Kusha as kings over his divided kingdom, and sent messengers to Mathurā to acquaint Shatrughna of his resolve. Without pausing for either rest or sleep the messengers accomplished their journey in three days, and informed Shatrughna that Rāma and Bharata, with the whole population of Ayodhyā, had resolved to go to heaven.[2] When he heard of the impending 'dreadful destruction of his race,' Shatrughna resolved to join his brothers. He divided his kingdom between his two sons, and having bidden farewell to

[1] According to the first book of the poem, Rāma was one half of Vishnu Bharata one-fourth of Vishnu, while the twins, Lakshmana and Shatrughna, shared the remaining fourth between them. That would mean that Lakshmana was only one-eighth part of Vishnu. The poet's arithmetic is thus at fault. In the eighty-second canto, Brahmā tells his brother gods that Shatrughna is the first portion of Vishnu's person (Dutt. p. 1780.) In the sixth book (c. 59) Lakshmana is twice spoken of as a portion of Vishnu. Dutt. pp. 1284–5.

[2] It is so expressed in the poem. The previous canto says that Rāma decided to go to the forest. But his subsequent action as well as his reply to Time, would show that he had resolved to make *the great departure*, and go to heaven. It is said that Ayodhyā remained empty for many long years. Capital cities were erected for Kusha and Lava in their respective shares of their father's kingdom.

his subjects and ministers, proceeded to Ayodhyā. By the time Shatrughna reached his native town and had obtained Rāma's consent to go with him, great numbers of monkeys, bears and Rākshasas had arrived also. These bears and monkeys were, of course, sons of the celestials and they asked Rāma's permission to join themselves to his company. Rāma gave them leave, but Jāmbavān the king of the bears and Hanumān were not included. The former was told that he would continue to live to the end of the fourth age of the world. Hanumān was informed that it was settled that he would live for ever and that he would continue to carry out Rāma's commands as long as the story of Rāma's deeds was current in the world.

Rama ascends to heaven

This was the last night Rāma spent on earth. At day-break on the following day, he proceeded, as Lakshmana had done, to the banks of the Sarju river, reciting, as he went, hymns from the Veda. In his hands he held some sacred grass. He was accompanied by Shri on his right hand and the Earth-goddess on his left. His weapons, assuming human form, followed in his wake. The four Vedas, the Gāyatrī verse, the sacred letters Om and Vashatkāra were also in atttendance.[1] The whole population of Ayodhyā too was there: the citizens with their wives and families, their beasts and birds; Bharata and Shatrughna with their wives; the ministers of state with their sons and friends; the bears and monkeys; the eunuchs and women of the zenānā; the female servants, old and young; indeed, every creature that was endowed with life, with rishis and Asuras, followed their king 'wonderfully happy and delighted,' followed Rāma to the open gates of heaven. When he had entered the waters of the holy Sarjū, and stood on the spot where he had resolved to renounce his earthly form, Brahmā was waiting to receive him. The gods

[1] Shri is of course Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune and the wife of Vishnu. We are thus to understand that Rāma is already reunited to Sītā in her divine form. The reader will remember that it was the earth-goddess that opened her breast to receive Sītā. For an explanation of *Gāyatri verse*, Om, and Vashatkāra, see Note 11.

had also assembled, riding in their celestial cars which numbered a thousand millions. The songs of Gandharvas and Apsarasas filled the air; garlands fell from the sky and fragrant winds began to blow. The Grandsire uttered words of welcome and said that the gods rejoiced at his coming. He was the immortal and imperishable one, the refuge of all creatures, beyond the reach of thought, beyond the knowledge of anyone, 'save Māyā his former spouse.' When Brahmā had thus spoken, the other celestials, with Indra and Agni at their head, bowed down in worship before him. They declared that by his coming they were freed from sin, and the desires of their hearts had been fulfilled. Rāma then addressed the gods, but it is to be noted that the poet now calls him Vishnu, and his address was a request that those who had 'followed him out of love' might have a suitable region allotted to them in heaven. The 'father of all creatures' replied that they would go to the region of Santānaka. 'It had all the attributes of Brahmā's heaven and was next to it.' It did not matter in which state, however degraded, anyone was born, if he 'thought of all objects as Vishnu,' that was his destined and appointed place. As for the bears and monkeys, they would enter the deities from whom they had originated and obtain their respective fathers' forms. In accordance with the injunction of Brahmā, all those who were present, human beings, beasts and birds, descended into the waters of the Sarjū. And from these holy waters they ascended up on high, riding in celestial cars their earthly bodies cast aside, and clothed in the effulgence of the gods.[1]

[1] In giving a summary of this section of the poem, I have quoted very largely from Mr. Dutt's Translation. Another epilogue, similar to that which appears at the end of the sixth book, recounts the blessing that flows from reading the *Rāmāyana* which is 'sacred like the Vedas.' The reading of a single verse cleanses from all sin. And it repeats that Vālmīki was the author of this poem together with the future story of the deity and the Uttarakānda. 'Even Brahmā admitted this.' The reader as he reads the story of Rāma's ascension to heaven will recall the beautiful description of *the great departure* in the closing pages of the *Mahābhārata*. One feels that this is a feeble attempt to copy one of the most moving passages in all literature. Rāma and his friends had an easy and an abundant entrance. Yudhisthira passed through great tribulation and in the hour of bitterest agony was faithful unto death.

APPENDIX I

Description of Ayodhya

As an illustration of the poet's ideals, I venture to quote at length, from Mr. Dutt's translation, the description of Ayodhyā which appears in the fifth and sixth cantos of the first book.

'There is on the banks of the Sarayu a great and flourishing country called Kosala abounding in corn and wealth, in which the inhabitants passed their days pleasantly. And the capital of that country was Ayodhyā famed among men, which was founded by Manu himself—that foremost of men. And that beautiful and mighty city was twelve yojanas in length and ten in breadth; and was intersected outside with spacious roads laid out orderly. And scattered with blown blossoms, and regularly sprinkled with water, the well-arranged broad high-ways looked beautiful. And that one bringing prosperity unto mighty kingdoms, King Dasharatha, lived in that city, like unto the lord of the deities inhabiting the celestial regions. And the city was furnished with doors and gates, and well arranged rows of shops. And it contained all kinds of instruments and arms, and was inhabited by all classes of artizans. And that graceful and matchlessly brilliant city abounded in eulogists and genealogists. And it was crowned with stately edifices with flags, and guarded by hundreds of *Sataghnis*. And the mighty city contained theatres for females, and gardens, and mango-groves; and was enclosed by a wall. And encircled by a deep moat, the city was accessible neither to friend nor foe. And it abounded with elephants and horses, and kine and camels and asses. And it was thronged with neighbouring kings come to pay tribute, and inhabited by merchants from various countries, and adorned with mountain-like palaces glittering with gems, and filled with sporting-places for females, and like unto Indra's Amarāvati. And the city was wonderful to behold, gleaming with gold-burnished ornaments, and inhabited by troops of courtezans, and abounding in all kinds of gems, and graced with royal palaces. And it abounded in paddy and rice, and its water was sweet as the juice of the sugar-cane. And it resounded with the sounds of *Dundubhis* and *Mirdangas* and *Vinās* and *Panavas*. And that foremost spot of all the earth was like unto an aerial car obtained in heaven by the Siddhas, through force of ascetic austerities, and thronged with the best specimens of humanity. And that city was filled by king Dasharatha with thousands of such Mahārathas light-handed and accomplished in fight, as could by force of arms or sharpened shafts slaughter infuriated lions and tigers and boars roaming in the forest; yet as

would not pierce with arrows persons lorn or abandoned or hiding or fugitive. And it abounded mostly in excellent Brāhmins, lighting the sacrificial fire, and crowned with qualities, and versed in the Vedas and the Vedāngas, and giving away thousands, and ever abiding by truth, and high-souled, and resembling mighty ascetics.

'. . . And in that excellent city, the men were happy and righteous-souled, and widely-read, and each contented with his possessions, and devoid of covetousness, and speaking the truth. And in that prime of cities, there was none who had not at his command a plenteous supply of the good things, and there was no householder who was not well off in horses and kine, and corn and wealth. And one could see nowhere in Ayodhyā persons given up to lust, or unsightly, or crooked-minded, or unlettered, or atheistical. And all the men and all the women were of excellent character, and subdued senses, and a happy frame of mind, and both in respect of occupation and conduct spotless like unto *Maharshis*. And all wore ear-rings and tiaras and garlands, and abundantly enjoyed the good things of life. And all were clean, daubing their limbs, and perfuming their person, and feeding on pure food, and giving away, and wearing *Angadas* and *Nishkas*, and hand-ornaments and repressing passions. And there were not in Ayodhyā persons not lighting the sacrificial fire, or not performing sacrifices, or mean-minded, or thieving, or engaged in improper occupations, or of impure descent. And the Brāhmins of subdued senses were always engaged in the performance of their own duties, giving away in charity, and studying, and receiving gifts with discrimination. And none of them was atheistical or untruthful or slenderly-read or detracting or incompetent or illiterate. And there was no Brāhmin who was not versed in the Vedas and Vedāngas, or not observing vows, or not giving away by thousands, or poor-spirited, or of insane mind, or afflicted. And no man and woman was seen devoid of grace or beauty, or lacking in reverence for their monarch. And the four orders with Brāhmins at their head contained persons serving gods and guests, and endowed with gratitude, and munificent, and heroic, and possessing prowess. And the men were long-lived; and ever abode by duty and truth; and lived in that best of cities, always surrounded by sons and grandsons and wives. The Kshatriyas were obedient unto the Brāhmins, and the Vaishyas followed the Kshatriyas, and the Sudras, occupied with their proper vocations, ministered unto the three other orders. And that city was ably governed by that lord of Ikshwāku's line, even as that foremost of men, the intelligent Manu, had governed it before him' (Dutt's Translation, pp. 17–21).

APPENDIX II

The Greatness of Kings

The passage in Book ii. c. 67, describing the greatness of kings, is one of the only too few passages that gives us information as to the social condition of the people in ancient times. It may be a real picture, but it shows, at least, what men hoped for their country.

'Verily doth a kingdom go to ruin when without a king. He that goes garlanded with lightning, and has a mighty voice, even the Cloud—doth not with skyey shower drench the earth in a kingdom without a king. In a kingless kingdom no one sows corn. In a kingless kingdom the son does not obey his sire, or the wife her husband. A kingless kingdom possesses no wealth, and wives are hard to keep in such a place. This great fear attends a kingless country. And where is other morality (besides that detailed above) to be found at such a place? In a kingless country men do not form themselves into associations, nor do they, inspired with cheerfulness, make elegant gardens or sacred edifices. In a kingless country the twice-born ones do not celebrate sacrifices. In a kingless country in mighty sacrifices wealthy Brāhmins do not confer (on the officiating priests) the *dakshināś* (which they receive according to the ordinance). In a kingless country neither social gatherings, nor festivities characterized by the presence of merry theatrical managers and performers, increase. In a kingless country disputants cannot decide their point; nor are persons given to hearing Purānic recitations pleased by those delighting in the practice. In a kingless country bevies of virgins decked in gold do not repair to gardens for purposes of sport. In a kingless country the wealthy are not well protected; nor do shepherds and cultivators sleep with their doors open. In a kingless country pleasure-seeking people do not in company with females go to the woods by means of swift vehicles. In a kingless country long-tusked elephants sixty years old, bearing bells on their necks, do not walk in the highway. In a kingless country one hears not the clappings of persons engaged in shooting arrows constantly. In a kingless country traders coming from distant lands, loaded with various kinds of merchandise, do not with safety go along the roads. In a kingless country the ascetic with his subdued senses, himself his sole protector, who makes his quarters wherever evening overtakes him, cannot walk contemplating the Deity. In a kingless country one cannot protect what one has, or procure what one has not' (Dutt. pp. 378–9).

APPENDIX III

Prayers in the Ramayana

As has been said in the Introduction, only a few prayers addressed to the gods are to be found in the poem. Sītā's prayer to the Ganges was there quoted in full. Kausalyā's prayer for her son, that he might be protected from every danger in the forest, also deserves quotation. It is taken from Mr. Dutt's translation, p. 263 (Book ii. c. 25).

'Kausalyā subduing her sorrow and touching holy water began to perform auspicious ceremonies for Rāma, and spoke unto him saying: "Do thou, Oh best amongst the descendants of Raghu, repair now, as I cannot dissuade thee, but do thou return speedily and follow the footsteps of great ones. Let that virtue, Oh best of Rāghavas, protect thee, which thou hast followed with gladness and self-discipline. Let the deities, whom you worship every day in the temple, together with the Maharshis protect thee in the forest. Let those weapons conferred upon thee by the great Vishvāmitra protect thee always gifted with good qualities. Do thou of mighty hands live forever, being protected by the truth and merit of thy continual services to thy father and mother. May the holy fuel, sacrificial grass, sanctified altars and court-yards, the sacred ground of mendicant Brāhmins, mountains, trees great and small, lakes, birds, serpents and lions protect thee. Oh best of men, may *Śidhya*, *Bishvadeva*, *Maruta*, the great ascetics, the sustainer, and the preserver of the creation, *Pusa*, *Bhaga*, *Aryamā*, *the Lokapālas*, headed by *Indra* and others, the six seasons, the months, day, night, moments, *Shrutis*, *Smritis*, and virtue protect thee, Oh my son, on all sides. May the great deity *Skanda*, *Soma*, *Brihaspati*, *Saptarshi*, *Nārad*, *the Moon* and other ascetics protect thee. May the encircled regions with their lords, being pleased with my eulogy, protect thee, Oh my son, always in the forest. When thou shalt repair unto the wood, may the mountains, oceans, *Varuna*, the heaven, sky, earth, air, things movable and immovable, planets and stars with their presiding deities, day, night, and evening protect thee. May the six seasons, months, years and all the divisions of time confer upon thee pleasure always when thou of great intelligence shalt wander away into the forest in the attire of an ascetic. May the deities and demons ever minister unto thy happiness and may not fear proceed unto thee, Oh my son, from the terrible Rākshasas and Pisāchas intent on committing cruel deeds, and other animals living on flesh. May the apes, scorpions, wild gnats, reptiles, and insects make thee

no harm; may not the elephants, tigers, terrible looking bears, hogs, buffaloes and other horned animals hurt thee. Being worshipped by me from here may the ferocious cannibal races of all kind bring thee no injury. May thy course be crowned with auspiciousness and thy powers with success. Do thou, Oh my son, repair unto the forest, being profusely provided with fruits, roots and other things. May all the creatures of the sky, all those who breathe on this Earth, and all those deities who are hostile unto thee contribute to thy welfare. May *Sukra*, *Soma*, *Sun*, the lord of wealth and death, protect thee, Oh Rāma, resorting to the forest of Dandaka. May fire, air, smoke, and the *mantras* uttered by the Rishis protect thee, Oh descendant of Raghu, at the time of thy bathing. May the lord of creation, Rishis and all the remaining deities defend thee when dwelling in the forest."[1] She added these words in final farewell, "I have worshipped the deities, headed by Shiva and others, the great ascetics, the genii and snakes; may they—all—and the four cardinal points, Oh Rāghava, contribute to thy welfare, who art going to the forest for a long time." '

A brief prayer of Rāma's, addressed to his native city when he set out for exile, is also worthy of notice. 'O best of cities, governed by Kākutsha, I address thee, as well as the deities, that inhabit and guard thee. Returning from my abode in the woods, I will, freed from my debt unto the lord of earth, behold thee again along with my father and mother. (Dutt, p. 327. ii. c. 50.)

[1] *Aryamā* are 'a class of manes or deified progenitors.' The *Saptarshi* are the *seven rishis*. The *Lokapalas* are the deities who protect the various regions of the universe, *Nārada* is the rishi of whom we read in the beginning of the poem (See Note 2).

The *Srutis* are the *Vedas* or Revelation. The *Smritis* are the *Books of Tradition*, or what has been remembered. The '*great deity Skanda*' is the god of war. *Brihaspati* is the priest of the gods. *Shukra* is the priest of the demons. *Soma*, originally the beverage offered to the deities, was in later times the name appropriated to the moon, as it is here, in conjunction with the Sun. *Vishvadeva*, a word meaning 'all the gods' applied to nine deities in Vedic time, to which all the others, mentioned in this prayer more or less belong.

APPENDIX IV

Rama's Hymn to the Sun

The long collection of names of which this hymn almost entirely consists has been put into very spirited verse by Mr. Griffith, in his metrical translation of the *Rāmāyana*. He says in a note that he has not attempted to give a faithful rendering of the whole hymn. He also suggests that the hymn is an interpolation as it does not appear in the Bengal recension of the poem.

There faint and bleeding fast, apart
Stood Rāvan raging in his heart.
Then moved with ruth for Rāma's sake,
Agastya came and gently spake:
'Bend, Rāma, bend thy heart and ear
The everlasting truth to hear
Which all thy hopes through life will bless
And crown thine arms with full success.
The rising sun with golden rays,
Light of the worlds, adore and praise;
The universal king, the lord
By hosts of heaven and fiends adored.
He tempers all with soft control:
He is the gods' diviner soul;
And gods above and fiends below.
And men to him their safety owe.
He Brahmā, Vishnu, Siva, he
Each person of the glorious Three,
Is every God whose praise we tell,
The King of Heaven, the Lord of Hell:
Each God revered from times of old,
The Lord of War, the King of Gold:
Mahendra, Time and Death is he,
The Moon, the Ruler of the Sea.
He hears our praise in every form—
The manes, Gods who ride the storm,
The Asvins, Manu, they who stand
Round Indra, and the Sādhyas' band
He is the air, and life and fire,
The universal source and sire;
He brings the seasons at his call,
Creator, light, and nurse of all.
His heavenly course he joys to run,
Maker of Day the golden sun.
The steeds that whirl his car are seven,
The flaming steeds that flash through heaven.
Lord of the sky, the conqueror parts
The clouds of night with glistering darts,
He, master of the Vedas' lore,
Commands the clouds' collected store:

He is the rivers' surest friend;
He bids the rains, and they descend.
Stars, planets, constellations own
Their monarch of the golden throne.
Lord of twelve forms, to thee I bow,
Most glorious King of heaven art thou.
O Rāma, he who pays aright
Due worship to the Lord of Light
Shall never fall oppressed by ill,
But find a stay and comfort still.
Adore with all thy heart and mind
This God of Gods, to him resigned;
And thou his saving power shalt know
Victorious o'er thy giant foe.'

APPENDIX V

Sita's Appeal

When Sītā at last looked upon her husband's face and expected to be taken to his arms, she found instead that he would have nothing to do with her and bade her go anywhere she chose. Here is what he said in Mr. Griffith's translation, p. 495. Book vi. 117.

'But, lady, 'twas not love for thee
That led mine army o'er the sea.
'Twas not for thee our blood was shed,
Or Lankā filled with giant dead.
No fond affection for my wife
Inspired me in the hour of strife.
I battled to avenge the cause
Of honour and insulted laws.
My love is fled, for on thy fame
Lies the dark blot of sin and shame;
And thou art hateful as the light
That flashes on the injured sight.
The world is all before thee: flee;
Go where thou wilt, but not with me.
How should my home receive again
A mistress soiled with deathless stain?
How should I brook the foul disgrace,
Scorned by my friends and all my race?
For Rāvan bore thee through the sky,
And fixed on thine his evil eye.
About thy waist his arms he threw,
Close to his breast his captive drew,
And kept thee, vassal of his power,
An inmate of his ladies' bower.'

To which Sītā replied:

'Canst thou, a high-born prince, dismiss
A high-born dame with speech like this?
Such words befit the meanest hind,
Not princely birth and generous mind.
By all my virtuous life I swear
I am not what thy words declare.
If some are faithless, wilt thou find
No love and truth in womankind?
Doubt others if thou wilt, but own
The truth which all my life has shown.
If, when the giant seized his prey,
Within his hated arms I lay,
And felt the grasp I dreaded, blame
Fate and the robber, not thy dame.

What could a helpless woman do?
My heart was thine and still was true.
Why when Hanumān sent by thee.
Sought Lankā's town across the sea,
Couldst thou not give, O lord of men,
Thy sentence of rejection then?
Then in the presence of the chief
Death, ready death, had brought relief,
Nor had I nursed in woe and pain
This lingering life, also in vain.
Then hadst thou shunned the fruitless strife
Nor jeopardized thy noble life,
But spared thy friends and bold allies
Their vain and weary enterprise.
Is all forgotten, all, my birth,
Named Janak's child, from fostering earth?
That day of triumph when a maid
My trembling hand in thine I laid?
My meek obedience to thy will,
My faithful love through joy and ill,
That never failed at duty's call
O King, is all forgotten, all?'
To Lakshman then she turned and spoke,
While sobs and sighs her utterance broke:
'Sumitrā's son, a pile prepare,
My refuge in my dark despair.
I will not live to bear this weight
Of shame, forlorn and desolate.
The kindled fire my woes shall end
And be my best and surest friend.'
His mournful eyes the hero raised
And wistfully on Rāma gazed,
In whose stern look no ruth was seen,
Nó mercy for the weeping queen.
No chieftain dared to meet those eyes,
To pray, to question or advise.
The word was passed, the wood was piled
And fain to die stood Janak's child.
She slowly paced around her lord,
The Gods with reverent act adored.
Then raising suppliant hands the dame
Prayed humbly to the Lord of Flame:
'As this fond heart by virtue swayed
From Raghu's son has never strayed,
So, universal witness, Fire
Protect my body on the pyre,
As Raghu's son has idly laid
This charge on Sītā, hear and aid.'
She ceased: and fearless to the last
Within the flame's wild fury passed,
Then rose a piercing cry from all
Dames, children, men, who saw her fall
Adorned with gems and gay attire
Beneath the fury of the fire.'

APPENDIX VI

Brahma's hymn in praise of Rama

In the sixth book of the *Rāmāyana* (vi. 119) when Rāma said to the assembled gods, 'I know myself to be a man, Rāma son of Dasharatha. Let the great Patriarch tell me who I am, and whence I have come,' Brahmā replied, 'Oh lord, thou art the great and effulgent Nārāyana, holding the discus and mace; thou art the boar having one tusk; thou hast conquered the past, present and future; thou art undecaying and without end; thou art the great virtue of the pious—thou art the propounder of all laws and art four-armed, thou art the holder of the bow of time—the subduer of the senses—the excellent Purusha, unconquerable by sins; thou art Vishnu holding the dagger, Krishna and of incomparable strength; thou art the army, the minister—the universe—the understanding, forgiveness and control of passion; thou art the creation and destruction, Upendra and the slayer of the demon Madhu; thou art the creator of Indra; thou art Mahendra; thou hast a lotus-like navel and thou art the slayer of enemies. The celestials and the great saints call thee the refuge of those who seek for shelter. Thou art the foremost of Vedas with its thousand branches and hundred regulations. Thou art thyself the creator of the three worlds, O lord. Thou art the refuge of the Siddhas and Sādhyas; thou art the Purvaja, the sacrifice, Vashatkār, OM and Parātpara. No one is conversant with thy birth and destruction, thou art manifest in all creatures, cows and Brāhmins, in all quarters, in the sky, in the mountain and in the river. Thou art gifted with a thousand legs, a thousand heads and a thousand eyes. Thou dost uphold all creatures, the earth and all the mountains. Thou appearest like the great serpent in the water underneath the earth. O Rāma, thou dost uphold three creations—the celestials, the Gandharvas and the Dānavas. O Rāma, I am thy heart, the worshipful Sarasvati (goddess of learning) is thy tongue, and all other celestials, O lord, created by Brahmā, are the down on thy body. The closing of thy eye is the night and the opening of it the day. The Vedas are significant of thy desire and the control thereof; none has got independent existence but thee. The whole universe is thy body, the earth is thy patience, the fire is thy anger, the sun and the moon are thy delight; thou hast got Sreebatsha (a peculiar curl of hair); thou didst before tread the three worlds with thy footsteps; thou didst get the dreadful Bali bound and make Mahendra king; Sītā is Lakshmi and thou art Krishna and Vishnu, the preserver of people. For Rāvana's destruction thou hast

assumed the human shape. Thou hast accomplished that work of ours, O thou, the foremost of the pious. O Rāma, Rāvana has been slain, do thou go up to heaven delighted. Thy godly energy is sure and thy prowess never goes for nothing. The sight of thee and the chanting of the glory are never fruitless' (quoted from Dutt's translation, pp. 1511–1512). The god closes his hymn by saying that those who will chant this theme will never be unsuccessful either in this world or the next.

It will be observed that Krishna who at a later time was recognised as an incarnation of Vishnu is here spoken of. It was Krishna who slew Madhu, a feat here attributed to Rāma, and the name of Upendra was given to Krishna by Indra. For an explanation of Vashatkār and OM see Note 11. Parātpara means *the greatest of the great*. *Lakshmi* is the goddess of prosperity. Mahendra is another name for Indra. The Siddhas were 'semi-divine beings of great holiness and purity'; the Sādhyas were inferior deities, said to be the personified rites and prayers of the Vedas. Both classes lived in the intermediate region between heaven and earth. It will be noticed that there is a reference to Vishnu's incarnation as the Boar, and his incarnation as the Dwarf who circumvented Bali, when he covered the three worlds in three steps. *Nārāyana*, originally applied to the god Brahmā, was afterwards a very common name for Vishnu. *Purusha*, which means *man* collectively or individually, is also used for the *Soul* of the Sānkhya philosophy and for the *Supreme Spirit* or *Soul of the Universe*. When used for God as the Supreme Being, it is identified variously with Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva.

APPENDIX VII

Ravana's Earlier History

When Agastya, with other ascetics, came to congratulate Rāma on his triumphant return to Ayodhyā, he gave the king an account of Rāvana's earlier history. Only a few incidents are given in the summary of the seventh book. The rest are very briefly summarised here.

In the first age of the world, Pulastya, the mind-born son of Brahmā, had his asylum on the slopes of Mount Meru. His religious rites were frequently disturbed by a number of girls, the daughters of his brother ascetics, who interrupted his austerities by singing and dancing in the neighbourhood. One day in his anger, he declared that if any of them came near his asylum again, they would become pregnant. Greatly alarmed by this threat, the maidens gave the holy man a wide berth. But one of them who had not heard of the imprecation, searching for her companions, approached the forbidden spot, with the result that the threat at once took effect. In her grief the girl hastened to her father and told him what had happened. The father at once grasped the situation, took his daughter to Pulastya and offered her in marriage. Happily Pulastya agreed to the proposal, and the damsel gave birth to a son, called Vishrava, as eminent as his father in knowledge of the Vedas and ascetic merit. This son married a daughter of the rishi Bharadwāja, and these two in turn became the parents of a child who, when he grew up, surpassed even his father and grandfather in the fervour of his austerities. He lived for long ages on air and water. For a thousand years, he abstained from even air and water. Brahmā was so pleased with him that he made him the god of riches, under the name of Kuvera, presented him with the car Pushpaka, and appointed him to act with Yama, Indra, and Varuna as one of the four Lokapālas, or guardians of the world. When he consulted his father about a dwelling place, Kuvera was advised to take possession of Lankā. It had been built for the use of the Rākshasas by Vishvakarmā, the architect of the gods. These demons, however, had abandoned it out of fear of Vishnu and taken refuge in hell.

Rāma was greatly surprised to hear this reference to the Rākshasas, for he had always understood that these demons were the descendants of Pulastya. But Agastya had another origin for them which he proceeded to expound. Prajāpati, it appears, sprang from water and created water first. For the protection of the water, he created certain creatures. When the god told

them to protect the water, some of them replied, 'Rakshāma,' (we shall protect) but others said 'Yakshāma' (we shall worship) and in consequence Brahmā said to the former, 'Your name is Rākshasa,' and to the latter, 'Your name is Yaksha' (Dutt, p. 1562). A long description then follows of how these Rākshasas gave way to pride and foolishness, fighting with the gods and putting them to flight. This fact did not prevent them from practising almost unheard of austerities, which obtained from Brahmā the double boon that they should be both invincible and immortal.[1] Indeed they went about boasting that they were gods themselves, calling themselves by the very names of Vishnu, Rudra, Indra, Varuna and so on. When the celestials appealed to Shiva for help,[2] that god said he could not help them, but he advised them to seek the help of Vishnu, 'that god of gods.' In the narrative Vishnu is called the younger brother of Indra, a reference to the fact that they were both at one time spoken of as *Adityas* (see Note 3). His incarnation as the man-lion is also referred to. In the end Vishnu drove the Rakshasas out of Lankā, and they took refuge in the seventh or lowest hell (Pātāla).

One of these exiled Rākshasas, Sumālī, on a visit which he paid to the earth conceived the idea that the demons might recover their power by a suitable marriage. He therefore instructed his daughter to go and place herself at the disposal of the ascetic Vishrava, whose son Kuvera had established himself, as we have seen, in the abandoned capital of Lankā. The young woman obeyed her father's command. The ascetic agreed to have her, though he pointed out that her offspring would be fierce and wicked in their natures. And so it proved. Her first born was Rāvana. Fearful omens were witnessed at his birth. After him came Kumbhakarna, the biggest creature on earth, then the daughter Shurpanakhā, and finally Vibhishana. The ascetic as a concession to his spouse, promised that Vibhishana alone would be like himself, devoted to the Vedas and deeds of piety. Of Vibhishana it is said that he stood on one leg for five thousand years, and for another five thousand years worshipped the Sun. And yet the two other brothers were equally devout. For we read that Kumbhakarna spent the same period of time seated between the five fires in summer, and standing in water during the rainy season and in winter. But it is made plain that when Rāvana engaged in asceticism it was jealousy of his step-brother the god Kuvera, and the desire to excel him in glory, that were the motives of his piety. The method he adopted was specially drastic. He lived without food for ten thousand years.

[1] Dutt, in his translation, says that they were made immortal (p. 1566). Muir in his abstract of this section says that Brahmā conferred on them 'invincibility and long life' (O. S. T. vol. iv. p. 487).

[2] Shiva conferred on the Rākshasas the power of travelling through the air, while his wife Umā gave the boon that their females should conceive in a day, and that a child should in a day become as old as his mother (c. 4).

At the end of every 1,000 years he cast one of his ten heads into a sacrificial fire. When he was about to offer up his tenth head, Brahmā appeared and bade him ask a boon. Rāvana at once asked for immortality. When told that was impossible, he asked that he might be invincible against gods and demons. As for men, he said he didn't worry about them. This prayer was granted, and the god was kind enough to give him back his nine heads. When Vibhishana was told to ask a boon, he asked that even in times of calamity his mind might remain fixed on righteousness. Brahmā was so pleased with this request that he granted Vibhishana what he had refused to his brother, the gift of immortal life. When Kumbhakarna's turn came, the gods told Brahmā that that wicked friend had been devouring sages, Apsarasas and human beings, and should receive no favour, as he might otherwise 'eat up the three worlds.' It was accordingly agreed that Sarasvati, the goddess of speech, should enter into Kumbhakarna's throat, and inspire him to ask for a foolish boon. The trick was completely successful. Prompted by Sarasvati, Kumbhakarna asked that he might sleep for many years.

When the Rākshasas heard that Rāvana had secured such a wonderful boon, they cast off fear and came trooping up from hell. Going to Rāvana they proposed that he should eject his brother Kuvera from Lankā and make it his own capital. When Rāvana said that brothers should not fight he was reminded of the fact that the gods and demons (Daityas) were sons of the same father, namely Kashyapa, though of different mothers, Aditi and Diti. These brothers had waged war for ages, and indeed the earth had at first belonged to the demons, and been finally conquered by the gods. What the gods had done against their step-brothers the Daityas (or Asuras) he might do against his step brother Kuvera. After certain negotiations and on the advice of his father, the god of riches agreed to evacuate Lankā. Accompanied by his wives and children he retired to Kailās. We are next told of Rāvana's marriage to Mandodari, of the birth of his son, Meghanāda, so called because he roared like a cloud the day he was born, of Kumbhakarna's long sleep for thousands of years in a gorgeous palace built for him by Vishvakarmā during which time, Rāvana fought with and destroyed Devarshis, yakshas and Gandharvas. An attempt made by Kuvera to restrain his step-brother's evil deeds resulted in Rāvana waging war against him and stealing his Pushpaka car. So many millions of Kuvera's followers were slain that there was no room in the sky for the spirits of the dead warriors ascending to heaven.

This is followed by an encounter which Rāvana had with Shiva. The demon at first asked contemptuously who Shiva was, and as a punishment was told by Shiva's attendant, Nandi, that he and his race would be eventually destroyed by monkeys. When the god revealed his power, Rāvana sang his praises for a 1000

years. Shiva was so pleased that he gave him the present of a celestial weapon. This gift made Rāvana more presumptuous than ever. He travelled over the world in his car, fighting with and slaying Kshatriyas. He now came under the curse of a woman, Vedavatī, who was an earnest worshipper of Vishnu. Rāvana wished to make her his own, but she replied that her father before his death decided that she should marry Vishnu and no other.[1] In obedience to her father's resolve she was practising austerities. Rāvana mocked at the name of Vishnu as he had done at the name of Shiva and seized the girl by the hair. Vedavatī at once cut off her hair with her hand which had been transformed into a sword. She said she had been so polluted that she did not wish to live longer. If she cursed him she would lose the merit she had secured, but one thing was sure. In her next life she would be born to bring about Rāvana's destruction, and she would not be born of any female. Vedavatī then built a funeral pyre. When she had entered the fire, the gods rained down flowers. As a comment on this story Agastya said to Rāma, 'You are the eternal Vishnu,' and Vedavatī was reborn as Sītā, to accomplish the destruction of Rāvana.

Rāvana next appeared at a sacrifice in honour of the god Shiva, celebrated by a king named Marutta. The deities, who had come to share in the offerings, were so alarmed that they assumed the forms of different animals. Varuna became a swan, Indra a peacock, Kuvera a lizard, and Dharma a crow. It was well that they did so, because the great Rishis, who were present also, were all eaten up by Rāvana. When the wicked domon had gone away, Indra declared that the peacock, whose colour had previously been a plain blue, would have a hundred eyes in his plumage. The crow was told by Dharma that he would never die, except by a violent death. The swan's feathers had formerly been green and blue, but Varuna changed them into a spotless white. Rāvana continued to fight with and destroy many kings and their armies. But one day Nārada met him and asked why he fought with men who were unworthy of his steel, feeble creatures and short-lived, already plagued by hunger and thirst, disease and old age. It was with Yama, the god of death, he ought to wage war. If he conquered Death, he could say that he had vanquished all. Rāvana replied that he had already decided to attack Yama. Anxious not to miss any of the excitement involved in such a mighty contest Nārada hurried off to hades. As he journeyed to the land of the departed, the rishi wondered how it would be possible to conquer Time and the lord of Death, who ordained rewards and punishments to men, in accordance with the deeds,

[1] Vedavatī said that when her father died, 'thereat my forlorn mother . . . . embracing my father's body, entered into fire.' This is surely a case of Sati.

good and evil, that they had done. When Nārada reached the lower regions, he found Yama offering to Fire the good and evil fruits of men's actions.

The poem gives a graphic description of the lower world. '*Corporeal beings*' undergoing torture, crying aloud in their agony, preyed on by worms and dogs, swimming in seas of blood, travelling on burning sand, afflicted by hunger and thirst; while there were others enjoying the society of women and passing the time with dance and song, each class receiving the 'fruit of their acts.' It is added that those who had given gifts of milk were drinking milk; those who had given rice were eating rice; those who had given houses were dwelling in mansions. When Rāvana reached the land of the Pitris, he at once set free those who were enduring the punishment of their wicked deeds, for which he was attacked by Yama's army. The Pushpaka car was repeatedly destroyed, and as often was miraculously restored to its former shape. The fight lasted for seven days and nights. At last when Yama assisted by Death and Time, would have slain Rāvana, Brahmā intervened and said it must not be. Rāvana had been promised immunity and the word of a god could not be rendered false. It would 'render the triune universe false' (Dutt, p. 1625). Yama unwillingly agreed and considering it the wisest thing to do in the circumstances, disappeared from view, with the result that Rāvana boasted he had conquered the lord of the dead.

The demon next proceeded to Bhogavatī, the capital of Vāsuki, the serpent king. The battle that ensued lasted for a year. Brahmā here also intervened and told Vāsuki that he must make friends with Rāvana, as the boon made it impossible that he should be slain. This was done in the presence of Fire, and Rāvana spent a year at Bhogavati. He next went to Rasātala, the city of Varuna, where he saw Surabhi the divine cow, from whose milk was produced Kshiroda, the Sea of Milk. Varuna himself was not present, but his four sons acknowledged defeat. It is said that Rāvana walked round the wonderful cow, whose protection is sought by those holy men who live on the froth of milk.

A mysterious story thereafter follows of Rāvana's encounter with Bali, the demon, to circumvent whom Vishnu appeared in the Dwarf Incarnation. Bali is here spoken of as being exceedingly pious, devoted to Brāhmins and the study of the Vedas. As he entered Bali's abode Rāvana saw a 'huge-bodied man, dreadful as Shiva.' who, the demon told him, was the god Vishnu. A long account of Vishnu's greatness includes the statement that those who remember and worship him obtain all that they desire. We read that when Vishnu saw Rāvana coming to meet him with an uplifted weapon, he said, 'I shall not slay this sinner for the satisfaction of Brahma—and assuming his own shape, disappeared' (Dutt, p. 1636). But Rāvana, who had tried in vain to lift the discus of the god, boasted that he had made Vishnu run away. A refusal on the

part of the Sun to fight with Rāvana was similarly interpreted as an acknowledgement of defeat.

We now find Rāvana once more at war with human beings. Canto 26 describes a battle with Māndhāta, king of Ayodhyā, an ancestor of Rama. Celestial weapons were employed. Eventually Pulastya, Rāvana's grandfather, stopped the combat, and effected a reconciliation. Māndhāta is said to have 'conquered the world which consisted of seven islands beginning with the sea.'

Rāvana and his hosts now rose up in the sky for thousands of miles, to the regions inhabited by ganders, goblins, Siddhas and Chāranas. When they came to the region of the moon, Rāvana's followers felt the cold so much that they asked their master to descend. Brahmā persuaded the demon not to attack the moon, on the ground that 'this highly effulgent king of twice-born ones wisheth well-being unto all' (Dutt, p. 1643). But a bribe was necessary in the shape of an incantation which would make Rāvana invincible. Brahmā said it must be repeated on 'a string of beads.' It was addressed to the god Shiva, and consisted of a long list of names and titles, such as 'Thou didst uproot the eyes of Vagadeva and the teeth of Pushā; thou hast got a firebrand in thy mouth; thou art mad and makest people tremble; thou art the lord of sprites and goblins: thou art worthy of veneration. thou most excellent OM; thou art three-eyed, the lord of all celestials; thou art the protector and the creator of the universe; the Purusha; thou hast flowery teeth; thou hast dreadful beards,' etc., etc. Brahmā added that these 'eight hundred holy and excellent names' would 'remove all iniquities,' and if Rāvana recited them, he would be sure to destroy his enemies.

Rāvana's next exploit was a visit to an island, where he saw a mighty being, Mahajambunada, whom he and his hosts attacked, without making the least impression. Eventually this mysterious creature gave Rāvana a blow with his hand and disappeared under the earth. When Rāvana followed hard after him, he came to a place where he saw 3 millions of radiant beings, all exactly 'like the male he had seen before.' The story is very confused, but this much is plain, that Rāvana also saw the goddess Lakshmi and was filled with desire, and that the mysterious creature, whom he now beheld sitting on a bed, laughed aloud at Rāvana's presumption, while the fire of his energy smote the Rākshasa to the ground and he was told to depart, as Brahmā's boon protected him from death. It is added that before he went Rāvana saw within the body of this mighty being, the three worlds, with gods, manes, ascetics demons and men. When Rāma asked who this mysterious being was, he was told that he was the illustrious Kapila, that the three million beings, here called '*Three Kotis*,' were all deities equal Kapila in energy and power, but it is equally manifest, from a description that is given in another portion of this story, that Kapila

means Vishnu, and that we have here another encounter between the Rākshasa and that god.

The next canto tells how Rāvana carried off to Lankā the daughters of royal saints, gods and Dānavas. He was also so foolish as to compel Rambhā, the Apsarasa, to yield to his embraces. This guilty act brought upon him the curse of Nalakuvera that if he ever again forced a woman against her will, his head would break into seven pieces. When they heard of this curse, the chaste females among his captives were very delighted.

Canto 30 tells of the many sacrifices offered by Meghanāda, Rāvana's eldest son. They included the Agnistoma (to fire), the Ashvamedha (horse sacrifice), Bahu-suvarnaka (gifts of gold), Rājasūya (when tributary kings pay homage to their Lord Paramount; the Gomedha (the cow sacrifice), and Baisnaba (sacrifice in connexion with Vishnu). At this particular time the prince had just celebrated the Maheshwara sacrifice, in honour of Shiva, and that god had given him powers of illusion, by means of which he would be able to make himself invisible. Rāvana told his son he was not pleased with him for worshipping his enemies, Indra and others.

Rāvana and his followers next invaded heaven. Indra was greatly alarmed and appealed to his fellow deities. In particular, he asked Vishnu what he was prepared to do Vishnu replied that in virtue of Brahmā's boon, they were helpless. For himself, he proposed to take no part in the approaching battle, but in due season he would bring about the demon's death. At the same time, he advised the gods to take the field and do their best. After a mighty battle, which is described at great length, Indra was taken captive by Meghanāda and carried off to Lankā. Once more Brahmā intervened, told Rāvana that he was very pleased with his son's prowess in proof of which he would change his name to *Indrajīt*, or conqueror of Indra, but he must insist on Indra being set free. In recompense he offered a boon. Though Indrajīt was refused immortality, which he asked for first, he was finally promised that he would obtain, from a sacrifice offered to fire, a chariot and horses, and that so long as he remained in this chariot he would continue to be immortal. On the other hand, Indrajīt prayed that he might 'meet with destruction, if he should engage in battle without finishing his offerings to Fire' (Dutt, 1672). The reader will remember how in the sixth book, great emphasis was laid on the need of interrupting Indrajīt's offering to fire. When Indra was released, he was told by Brahmā that his defeat was a punishment for the great sin he had committed in ravishing Ahalyā, the wife of the rishi Gautama. The god was further urged to perform a sacrifice in honour of Vishnu which Brahmā said would purify him. Brahmā gave some information about Ahalyā. 'All creatures were originally of one caste, of the

same speech, and of one form in every respect. There was no distinction of them in appearance or characteristic (sexual) mark. . . . In order to distinguish them I formed one woman. Whatever there was most distinguished (excellent) in the several members of (different) creatures was taken to compose her. A woman, faultless (ahalyā) in form was then fashioned by me. *Hala* means ugliness, and *halya* that which springs from ugliness. She who has nothing sprung from ugliness is known as '*Ahalyā*' (quoted from Muir, O. S. T. vol. iv. p. 497). Strange to say, the next story records how Rāvana was taken prisoner by king Arjuna Kārtavīrya. Pulastya, Rāvana's grandfather, again appears on the scene, and persuades Arjuna to set him free. He had the satisfaction of knowing that he had defeated one who was invincible and in dread of whom the wind was afraid to blow. This contest took place on the banks of the Nerbudda. When bathing there, Rāvana set up a golden *Linga* in honour of the god Shiva, and worshipped it with flowers and sandal. The Rākshasa 'danced with uplifted hands and sang before it.'[1]

In conclusion, we learn that Rāvana visited Bali, king of the monkeys, and the brother of Sugriva. With Bali he made a league of friendship which calls for no remark. But the following story about Hanumān deserves mention. The day Hanumān was born he leapt up into the air as high as the sun, an act which caused Indra to strike him and break his jaw. Hanumān's father, Vāyu the wind god, was so angry that he retired to a cave and refused to come out. The consequence was that no wind blew, and deprived of wind the whole of creation was afflicted with absolute constipation. Unable to get relief and suffering great pain their abdomens swollen with wind, gods, demons and men went to Brahmā to complain. When the grandfather had duly explained the benefits accruing to human and other organisms from the free passage of wind, he joined himself to his fellow sufferers, in approaching and mollifying the offended god.

The reader will observe that the seventh book explains and gives details regarding many matters which are only referred to in the sixth and earlier books in connexion with Rāvana. It is manifest that the author of the earlier books was also acquainted with these legends, though he did not think it necessary to record them fully.

[1] This is the only reference to the Linga or *phallus* in the poem. In referring to the Dasyus or aborigines, whom the Aryans found on their arrival in India, Professor Berriedale Keith says, 'nor is there much doubt that they are the phallus worshippers who twice are referred to with disapproval in the *Rig-Veda*, for phallus worship was probably of pre-historic age in India and by the time of the *Mahābhārata*, had won its way into the orthodox Hindu cult.' (Cambridge History of India, vol. i. p. 85).

NOTES

NOTE 1

The authorship and date of the poem

It is said that Vālmīki, the reputed author of the *Rāmāyana*, was the son of the god Varuna. Although a member of the Brāhminical caste, tradition declares that he associated with robbers and took part in their evil deeds. On one occasion, he attacked *the seven rishis*, a wicked act which was eventually the means to his conversion. For, as a punishment of his sin, they condemned him to repeat the sacred name of Rāma reversed. He went on doing this for thousands of years, standing motionless on the same spot. When the rishis at the end of that time came to look for him, they found that he had been changed into an ant-hill, or Valmīk. It was in this way that he got his name. How he managed to write his poem after that is not explained. The poem itself however knows nothing of this absurd tradition. It tells us that he was an eminent ascetic, living in the forest, the friend of Rāma and Sītā, and that it was at the command of the god Brahmā, he began the composition of the epic, which will always be associated with his name. When Brahmā told him to begin his work, he sat down on sacred grass, facing the east, and sipping water according to the ordinance. When he had done so, he addressed himself to the contemplation of the subject through Yoga, and in virtue or his Yoga powers, he was able to see before him Rāma, Lakshmana and Sītā, with Dasharatha and his wives, laughing, talking and eating, and bearing themselves as in real life (Dutt's translation, p. 13). It adds that he not only saw all the past, but also what would happen in the future.

Despite these fanciful origins and derivations of both person and name, there is no reason why we should not believe that a person called Vālmīki was closely associated with the composition of the poem, or that the original portion of the epic was the work of one man. What that original nucleus was, is still a matter for debate. But Oriental scholars are generally of the opinion that not only was the seventh book an addition to the original work, but the first book as well, while it is held that many interpolations have been made in the others (II–VI). These interpolations are probably most manifest in the sixth book which has been greatly overloaded with incidents relating to the battle in Ceylon.

As to the time at which the poem was written, Weber (1875) was of the opinion that the poem might be dated about the beginning of the Christian era, and called special attention to the mention of Yavanas, Pahlavas and Shakas as an element that must

not be forgotten in the determination of the date. But that is a difficulty which can be overcome by saying that such references are interpolations made at a later time. Weber was also of the opinion that the *Rāmāyana* was later than the *Mahābhārata*. This view was combated by Monier-Williams (1893) who, among other arguments for the priority of the *Rāmāyana*, pointed to the fact that it contained no reference to Satī, or the burning of widows, which the *Mahābhārata* frequently does. But he was of the opinion that while the *Rāmāyana* began to take shape about 500 B.C. the final recension was not accomplished till the early centuries of the Christian era. Monier-Williams was also of the opinion that the original part of the *Rāmāyana* did not speak of Rāma as an incarnation of Vishnu, and that all such references in Books II to VI must be recognised as interpolations. Professor Macdonell (1913) shares the opinion of Monier-Williams as to the size of the original *Rāmāyana*, and also believes that a considerable time must have elapsed between the composition of the original poem and that of the additions. He goes on to say, 'And the human hero (like Krishna in the *Mahābhārata*) of the five genuine books (excepting a few interpolations) has in the first and last become defied and identified with the god Vishnu.' Professor Macdonell, while agreeing with Monier-Williams that the kernel of the poem was composed about 500 B.C., holds that it was completed considerably earlier, namely the second century B.C. and later.

As to the opinion that the original kernel of the poem did not contain any reference to Rāma as an incarnation of Vishnu, the words of caution used by Dr. Muir (1872) in his *Original Sanskrit Texts* (vol. iv. p. 481) are deserving of consideration when he quotes from the writings of Gorresio, the Italian translator of the *Rāmāyana*. They are to the following effect. 'The passages quoted only prove that the interpolation, if it be such, has been made with great study and much art. But in order thoroughly to elucidate this question, we must have recourse to other documents, and seek for other proofs and indications than the poem itself supplies. Our sentence therefore remains suspended.'

In conclusion, attention is called to the researches of Sir Ram Krishna Bhandarkar, who, in his book, *A Peep into the Early History of India*, (1920) lays much stress on the Brāhminical revival, which took place during the Gupta emperors. In that work he remarks that after several centuries of neglect, Brāhminism began to rise in influence and importance about the middle of the third century after Christ, and the Brāhmins made every effort to widen their influence and render it permanent. With that object, he says, they gave a new and more popular shape to the literature of their creed and re-arranged it in a manner to meet the wants, and be in harmony with the changed feelings of an increased number of their followers and strengthen their hold over them. Holding these opinions, though he does not mention the *Ramayana*, he says that the

Laws of Manu, based on a previous Sutra work and traditional or floating texts, was composed about the end of the fifth century A.D. and that the *Mahābhārata*, though it is proved to have existed in A.D. 493 and 532 must have been 're-touched about this period.'

NOTE 2

Narada

Statements as to the origin of Nārada are neither clear nor consistent. It is said that he is the author of some of the hymns in the *Rig Veda*. He is spoken of as one of the *Prajāpatis*, or lords of creatures. Sometimes he is included among the *seven great rishis*. The *Rig Veda* says he belonged to the family of Kanwa who, according to the *Mahābhārata*, brought up Shakuntalā when she was abandoned by her parents, Vishvāmitra and Menakā. The *Vishnu Purāna* says he was a son of Kashyapa, who was a son of Marichi the mind-born son of Brahmā, and that this mother was one of Daksha's many daughters. Another statement is to the effect that he was born from the brow of Brahmā. He plays a great part in the *Mahābhārata* and is represented as constantly passing between earth and heaven. He acquired the nick-names of 'the messenger or spy,' and 'the strife-maker.' He was also called the *monkey-faced*. He was able to visit heaven whenever he liked, without let or hindrance. He was deprived of this privilege by the curse of a brother rishi (*Mahābhārata*, 7. 55). The god Brahmā once cursed Nārada to lead a life of dissipation. Nārada retorted by condemning the god to lust after his own daughter and to be unworthy of the worship of men (See Dowson's *Classical Dictionary*, on Nārada p. 218). Nārada reappears in the seventh book of the poem, where he occupies a prominent place.

NOTE 3

The Thirty-Three Gods

The *Rig Veda* speaks of thirty-three gods, and harking back to Vedic times, the *Rāmāyana* quite frequently refers to the gods as 'the *Thirty-three*.' In particular, the vulture Jatāyus, in describing to Rāma the story of creation, says that *Aditi*, the wife of *Kashyapa*, was the mother of the *thirty-three gods*, the *Vasus* (8) the *Adityas* (12) the *Rudras* (11) and the *Ashwins* (2). (*a*) The *Vasus*, in Vedic times, were 'personifications of natural phenomena.' The *Mahābhārata* says they were the celestial attendants of the god Indra. They were cursed by the rishi Vasishtha for passing between him and the sun, when he was

engaged at prayer. For the story of their deliverance from this curse by the kindness of the goddess Ganga, see *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 35. 36. (*b*) The *Adityas* are supposed to represent the sun in the twelve months of the year. Varuna was one of their number, as well as Mitra, Aryaman, Bhaga and Daksha. Indra and Savitri, with Vishnu 'the youngest and the best' are sometimes included. (*c*) The *Rudras* were gods of the storm. It is said that there was originally one god bearing that name, who subdivided himself into eleven portions, some of which were fierce and others gentle. The name of *Rudra* is in later times often applied to Shiva. (*d*) The *Ashwins* in Vedic times were the twin sons of the sky. They were the harbingers of dawn. More probably they represented the change from darkness to light. Many hymns were addressed to them.

These Vedic deities were, with others, carried into Hinduism, and their origin differently accounted for. With the exception of Indra and Vishnu, and they too have been transformed, they have come to occupy a very inferior position. They may point a moral or adorn a tale. But that is all. They have been really pushed aside in favour of the greater gods of Hinduism, headed by Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva. The old names are often retained and old phrases like 'the thirty-three' are still used. But the reader will recognize that the teaching of the Vedas is very different from what he finds in this poem.

NOTE 4

The Prajapatis and the work of Creation

The first book of the *Rāmāyana* says that Kashyapa the rishi was the father of gods and demons. Kashyapa was the son of Marichi, one of the Prajāpatis or lords of creatures. In the sacred books of India, these Prajāpatis are always associated to a greater or lesser extent with the work of creation. It may be of advantage to the reader to note the teaching of the different books, which varies in many respects.

(1) In the *Vedas*, the name *Prajāpati* is applied to a number of gods. Sometimes, however, particular deity is addressed by that name, and he is thought of for the time being as the Creator, the giver of children and cattle.

(2) In the *Mahābhārata*, Brahmā is occasionally called *Prajāpati*, but the word is more commonly employed in the plural for the sons of Brahmā, who are said to be the progenitors of all created beings, gods and demons, animals and men. They are variously spoken of, as numbering seven, ten and twenty-

one. Six of them are called mind-born sons of Brahmā, namely *Atri*, *Marichi*, *Angiras*, *Pulaha*, *Pulastya* and *Kratu*. A seventh son *Daksha*, was born from the right toe of Brahmā, and his wife from the left toe. Four more are also spoken of; *Sthanu* and *Manu*, *Dharma* and *Bhrigu*.[1] How the first and second of this further group originated is not stated, but the last two sprang from Brahmā's breast. A great deal of information is given as to the descendants of these sons of Brahmā. Thus it is recorded of *Atri*, that he had sons without number. They all became great rishis, versed in the Vedas. Atri is the ancestor of the lunar race. *Pulastya* was the ancestor of demons and monkeys. He was the grandfather of Kuvera, the god of wealth, and of Rāvana, who carried off Sītā. *Pulaha's* descendants are tigers, lions and bears. *Daksha* is chiefly remarkable for his celebrated sacrifice, which the god Shiva interrupted, and for his family of sixty daughters, of whom *Diti* and *Aditi*, as well as six others were married to Kashyapa. Another, Umā, was the wife of Shiva, while Danu was the grandmother of Rāhu the enemy of the Sun and Moon, and the mother of the Dānavas or demons. This information we gather chiefly from the first book of the *Mahābhārata*.

But in the third book of that poem, where the familiar story of the flood is recorded, we find another explanation. There it is said that the present creation was due to *Manu*, the ninth on our list of Prajāpatis. Of Manu, it is said that he was given the task of creating all beings, gods, demons, beasts and men, when the flood had destroyed the whole of the previous universe with the exception of himself and *the seven rishis*.[2] Apart from this story, however, which belongs to another layer of tradition, Kashyapa, the son of the Prajāpati Marichi, occupies a place by himself, not only in the *Mahābhārata*, but also in the *Rāmāyana*, where he is called the father of all living creatures.

(3) To the exclusion of the other Prajāpatis, then, the *Rāmāyana* ascribes to Kashyapa this great pre-eminence in the work of creation. In the first book he is described as the husband of Diti and Aditi, the mothers of the gods and demons. But in the third book, the poem, entering into elaborate detail, tells how not only gods and demons, but every kind of bird and beast and reptile as well as man, were descended from him. Jatāyus, the great vulture who befriended Rāma, is our informant on this matter. (Bk. 3 c. 14). In this connexion, two points deserve special notice. (*a*) In the list of Prajāpatis, seventeen in number, which

[1] The *Mahābhārata* tells us that when the Pāndus went to visit the dying hero, Bhīshma, as he lay on the stricken field of Kurukshetra, they found him surrounded by Parushu Rāma the incarnation of Vishnu, and the rishis Marichi Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Kashyapa and Daksha, as also Mārkandeya with Brihaspati and Shukra, the priests of the gods and demons. See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 149.

[2] The *Shatapatha Brāhmana* says that Manu, by means of austerities, created a woman through whom the empty world was re-peopled.

the vulture gives, the great name of Manu does not appear. But strange to say, we are told that one of Kashyapa's wives was called *Manu*, and that this lady, Manu, was the mother of mankind. (*b*) It is further added that the Brāhmin was born from her mouth, the Kshatriya from her breast, the Vaishya from her thighs, and the Sudra from her feet.

(4) When we turn to the *Laws of Manu*, we get the more popular explanation of the origin of the four castes, as well as a more rational explanation of the origin of the gods. In the first chapter of that code it is declared that Brahmā created the gods, and that, for the good of the world, he caused the Brāhmin and the other three castes to proceed from his mouth, breast, thighs and feet respectively.[1] In the following section the code modifies this statement; there Manu, having recorded how he sprang from Brahmā by a process of sub-division within the deity, says that he first of all brought the ten Prajāpatis into being. And thereafter, the ten Prajāpatis created seven other Manus, gods, demons, kindly spirits, beasts, birds, fish, creeping things and men, as also every kind of immovable thing. This was done, says Manu, at my command, and as a result of austerities. His list of Prajāpatis is Atri, Marichi, Kratu, Pulastya, Pulaha, Angiras and Bhrigu, as recorded above with the following new names, Prachetas, Vasishtha and Nārada. In the chapter on the Householder, the *Laws of Manu* give yet another theory as to the process of creation. There it is said 'that the different classes of Manes or pitris are descended from the ten Prajāpatis (namely Marichi and the others) who sprang from Manu, the son of Brahmā. From Marichi came the manes of the gods; from Atri, the manes of the demons, snake deities and Gandharvas; the Brāhmins are descended from Bhrigu; the Vaishyas from Pulastya; the Kshatriyas from Angiras; and the Shudras from Vasishtha. From the ten Prajāpatis or sages, sprang the manes; from the manes, the gods; and from the gods, the whole created world.' See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, pp. 87, 167, 185, and *Summary of the Laws of Manu*, pp. 17-19 and 41. The manes or spirits of the dead are not merely any one individual's particular ancestors but the progenitors of mankind generally as well as of gods, demons, and other beings.

[1] In this list of seventeen Prajāpatis, Kashyapa appears as a Prajāpati, and not as a son of Marichi, as recorded in the *Mahābhārata*. And yet Kausalyā, Rāma's mother, tells us that Kashyapa was made a god because of the great reverence he paid to his mother.

[2] *The Mahābhārata* in addition to the more usual story that the four castes emanated from the mouth, breast, thighs, and feet of Brahmā (book xii.) says in book iii. that it was from Vishuu, not Brahmā that they originated. But in another place it makes the much more novel statement that at first only Brāhmins were created and that when the Brāhmins gave way to anger and pleasure they became Kshatriyas, when they took to trade they became Vaishyas, when they yielded to great falsehood and impure behaviour, they became Shudras. See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, pp. 88, 153, 167.

NOTE 5

Dasharatha's Ministers

(1) *Vashistha* was Dasharatha's prime minister and spiritual guide. Many of the hymns in the *Rig Veda* are ascribed to him. According to the *Laws of Manu*, he was one of the ten Prajāpatis and assisted at the creation of the present universe. When we remember that the four ages through which this universe has to pass amount to more than four millions of years, Vashistha in the days of Dasharatha, must have been a very old man indeed. The *Rig Veda* and the *Rāmāyana* says that he and Agastya were born from the seed of the gods Mitra and Varuna, which fell from them at the sight of the nymph Urvasi. Vashistha appears to have acted as prime minister to the kings of Ayodhyā for twenty-seven generations. As Dasharatha lived for nine thousand years we have in this fact, another illustration of his great age.

(2) *Vishvamitra*. The Rāmāyana records at length the story of this royal sage and his successful efforts to achieve the rank of a Brāhmin. His quarrel with Vashistha is mentioned in the *Rig Veda*. And the *Laws of Manu* uses him as an illustration in support of the argument that when your life is in danger you can take food from the hands of anybody and not be defiled. 'We know how the great and holy saint, Vishvāmitra took dog's flesh from the hands of a Chandāla in the time of a great famine' (see *Summary of the Laws of Manu*, p. 100.) This incident is also mentioned with considerable detail in the *Mahābhārata*. (Book XII). It happened towards the end of the Tretā and the commencement of the Dwāpara age; that is, at least one million years ago, during a drought which lasted for twelve years. Shops were closed the fields lay empty, the country side was covered with heaps of bones of men and beasts, the temples were forsaken and even Brāhmins died. In the extremity of their hunger men began to eat human flesh. Vishvāmitra suffered like others and, abandoning his wife and child, wandered everywhere in search of food. Eventually, he stole a piece of dog's flesh from the house of a Chandāla. When the Chandāla reproached him for eating such food, he defended himself by saying that Agastya had eaten the demon Vatāpi, when he was hungry, and he did not see why he should not be allowed to eat a dog (*Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 160).

(3) *Vāmadeva*. There was a rishi of this name of whom it is recorded that he refused to be born in the ordinary way, and insisted on entering the world by his mother's side. His mother asked Aditi the wife of Kashyapa, and the god Indra to persuade him against such procedure. The *Rāmāyana*, on the other hand, says that Vāmadeva was a son of Kashyapa the progenitor of gods and men. *Manu* refers to Vāmadeva, also, as having eaten dog's

flesh in a time of famine, while in the *Rig Veda* (iv. 18, 13). Vāmadeva is made to say 'in extreme destitution, I have cooked the entrails of a dog.'

(4) *Mārkandeya.* The *Mahābhārata* says of this person, that he had not only lived through the four ages of the world, but that he had witnessed many dissolutions of the universe. With the exception of Brahmā, he was the oldest inhabitant of heaven. Despite his great age he looked like a young man of twenty-five. He favoured the Pāndus by giving them a description of the dissolution of a previous universe. During that great catastrophe he took refuge, he said, in the stomach of the god Vishnu, where he saw the whole earth, mountains and rivers, cities and kingdoms, beasts and men, gods and demons, snake-deities, Gandharvas and rishis (See *Summary of Mahābhārata,* pp. 85. 92). He is the reputed author of the *Mārkandeya Purāna.*

(5) *Javāli.* He is in many ways the most interesting of all the ministers for the rationalistic views he employed to persuade Rāma to break the promise he had made to his father. (Book ii. 108, 109). Monier-Williams remarks of him (*Indian Wisdom*), 'If unbelievers like Javāli were brought on the scene, it was only that their arguments might be refuted and their characters reprobated.' (p. 315). But he also adds, 'His speech . . . is full of interest as indicating the prevalence of infidel and materialistic doctrines at the time when the Brāhminized version of the *Rāmāyana* was completed . . . . . Rāma's reply in which he indignantly rebukes Javāli, is a noble vindication of religion and faith' (p. 351).

Note 6

The Materialists of Ancient India

In the *Laws of Manu* we find a reference to those who treat with contempt the books of Revelation and Tradition, that is, the Veda and the Institutes of the Sacred Law. It is said that such persons have been listening to the arguments of those who reason. On this passage the commentators remark that those who reason are the followers of Buddha and Chārvāka. Of all such, *Manu* says that they should be cast out of society because they are atheists and scorners of the Vedas (See *Summary of Manu,* p. 26).

In the twelfth book of the *Mahābhārata* there is a very interesting passage which probably refers to these rationalists. King Yudhisthira says that 'in those days there were men going about, giving lectures to large numbers of people denying the existence of the soul, and speaking against the doctrine of liberation. They were very learned men, well versed in logic, but they were wicked men and fools for all that.' In the same book we read that,

when Yudhisthira assumed the sovereignty of Hastinapura, among the Brāhmins, who were present and disguised as such, there stood a Rākshasa called Chārvāka, who, instead of blessing, began to curse the king. The Brāhmins were very indignant, and cursed Chārvāka with the result that he at once fell down dead (See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, pp. 146–148).

As is well known, the Chārvākas were the materialists of ancient India. This sect accepted nothing but the testimony of the senses and acknowledged only the four principles, earth, air, fire and water. From these four, they said that intelligence was produced. They held that there was no difference between the soul and the body, and that all the phenomena of the world were spontaneously produced. (See Monier-Williams' *Indian Wisdom*, pp. 120–22.)

In the *Sarva Darsana Samgraha* of Mādhava Āchārya, translated by Cowell and Gough (Trübner), we have a very interesting quotation made by the author from Brihaspati, given as a summary of the teaching of this school. It shows what the orthodox had to contend against 2,000 years ago:

'There is no heaven, no final liberation, nor any soul in any other world.

'Nor do the actions of the four castes produce any real effect.

'The Agnihotra, the three Vedas, the ascetic's three staves and smearing oneself with ashes,

'Were made by nature as the livelihood of those destitute of knowledge and manliness.

'If a beast slain in the Jyotistoma rite will itself go to heaven,

'Why then does not the sacrificer forthwith offer his own father?

'If the Shrāddha produces gratification to beings who are dead,

'Then here, too, in the case of travellers when they start, it is needless to give provisions for the journey.

'If beings in heaven are gratified by our offering the Shrāddha here,

'Then why not give the food down below to those who are standing on the house-top?

'While life remains, let a man live happily, let him feed on clarified butter, even though he runs into debt,

'When once the body becomes ashes, how can it ever return again?

'If he who departs from the body, goes to another world,

'How is it that he comes not back again, restless for love of his kindred?

'Hence it is only as a means of livelihood that Brāhmins have established here.

'All these ceremonies for the dead—there is no other fruit anywhere.

'The three authors of the Vedas were buffoons, knaves and demons.

'All the well-known formulæ of the pandits, *jarpharī turpharī*, etc.

'And all the obscene rites for the queen commanded in the horse-sacrifice,

'They were invented by buffoons, and so all the various kinds of presents to the priests,

'While the eating of flesh was similarly commanded by night-prowling demons,'

'Such in the pleasant consummation,' says Mādhava Āchārya, sarcastically.

Note 7

The Sacrifice of Daksha

As has been stated in the text, there are many references in the *Rāmāyana* to Shīvā's intervention at the sacrifice of Daksha.[8] Most of them are very brief, the longest being the statement made by Janaka at the time Rāma bent the bow of Shiva. The frequency of the reference, however, shows that the story was well known and had made a great impression on the mind of antiquity. In the *Mahābhārata* (book xii) it is told with considerable detail, and in connexion with the origin of fever. Indeed it is told twice, in two succeeding chapters of the same book with great variations. I give my own abridgement of the story, taken from the *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 173.

(1) When Daksha was holding his famous sacrifice to which all the gods were invited except his own son-in-law, Shiva, Umā expressed her great indignation that her father should thus have slighted them both. Shiva sought to appease his angry spouse by saying it was an old arrangement with the gods, that he got no share in any of the sacrifices. This explanation did not at all please Umā, and she said she failed to see why the biggest god of all should be treated in such a manner. She was so overwhelmed with grief that she refused to speak to her husband again. Thus roused and summoning all his Yoga powers, Shiva hastened to the scene of sacrifice. Assisted by his goblin followers he extinguished the fires with blood, pulled up the stakes, and seized the celestial ladies, discourteously pushing them about. Countless bottles were broken and rivers of milk and treacle began to flow. Mountains of meat and dishes of every kind were scattered far and wide. The sacrifice itself in the form of a deer took refuge in flight. When Shiva saw it flee, he became so angry that a drop of sweat fell

from his brow. When the drop of sweat touched the ground, it caused a great fire, and from the fire a terrible creature was born, with blood-red eyes and a green beard. This creature at once consumed the fugitive sacrifice. To appease the angry god the others saw that they must offer Shiva from that day forth a share in every sacrifice. They did so on the condition that he recalled the mighty creature that his wrath had produced. It was finally agreed that it should be divided into many parts, and under the name of Fever live among men. If you read this story with undivided attention, you will get freedom from fever and always live happily.

(2) The second version of this story tells that the rishi Dadhīcha asked why Shiva had not been invited. It could not be a real sacrifice if Shiva (Rudra) was not present. Daksha replied that there were eleven Rudras in all, and he knew every one of them, but he did not know who this great god Maheshwar was, that Dadhīcha was talking about. He was offering a sacrifice to Vishnu the master of all the gods, without a peer. Dadhīcha's view however was that they would suffer some great calamity, and that their sacrifice would be destroyed, if they worshipped one who ought not to be worshipped and refused to worship him who ought to be adored. It should be added that when Shiva did arrive and caused the destruction of the sacrifice, Daksha remembered who his son-in-law was, and humbly sought forgiveness and a boon. He then proceeded to repeat the 1008 names of Shiva. The god was highly pleased with this adoration, declaring that it was equal to a 1000 horse-sacrifices and said that from henceforth Daksha would be the foremost of all living creatures. Best of all, he imparted to Daksha a creed which the gods and demons (Dānavas) had elaborated from the Vedas, and from the philosophies of Sānkhya and Yoga. These supernatural creatures had long used it in the practice of their austerities. It was the true means of liberation. It was full of mystery, and for that reason stupid people criticized it. It was a creed opposed to the duties laid down for the four castes and the four modes of life, with which it had very little in common. Shiva added that it was really himself who had in ancient days discovered this religion to which he gave the name of Pāshupata. There is no indication that Shiva expounded this religion of the gods to Daksha. Indeed it is said that he at once disappeared from view. The reader will note how Dadhīcha and Daksha respectively deny divinity to Vishnu and Shiva. The story deserves to be read with care. It is a strange combination of the higher and the lower, the old and the new ideas that were working in Hinduism.

(3) Another form of the story appears in the tenth book of the *Mahābhārata*, which probably belongs to an earlier period, and shows how the older gods of the Vedic period were being pushed aside by the greater gods of Hinduism. On this occasion Krishna,

the incarnation of Vishnu, is the narrator. 'Shiva was the highest of all the gods. He had assisted Brahmā at the creation, though he had quarrelled over the matter with Brahmā and gone off to the mountains to engage in austerities. In the Krita Yuga too, when the gods were celebrating a great sacrifice in accordance with Vedic ordinances, they had been so foolish as not to invite Shiva. They had neither proposed that he should assist them, nor share in the offerings. However, when Shiva heard of what they were doing, he came wearing the garb of a devotee and with a bow in his hand. When they saw him approach, the gods were greatly alarmed. The wind ceased to blow, fire would not burn. The light of the sun decreased. Assuming the shape of a deer, the sacrifice took refuge in flight, and she was followed by the god of fire. It was on this occasion when he was so angry, that Shiva broke Savitri's arms, plucked out the eyes of Bhaga, and drove the teeth of Pūshan down his throat. Eventually the gods managed to appease Mahādeva. They promised that in future he would always get the clarified butter at every sacrifice. And thus the world was saved. But Krishna assured Yudhisthira of the fact that when Shiva got angry matters were very serious indeed. When he was pleased everything was all right.

Savitri, Bhaga and Pūshan are, of course, all Vedic deities.

NOTE 8

The demon Rahu

Even more frequent than the reference to the sacrifice of Daksha, is the reference to the demon Rāhu, swallowing or attempting to swallow the sun and moon. This, the popular explanation of eclipses and still firmly believed in by many people in India, is said to be due to a quarrel of old standing that exists between the demon and the two luminaries. According to the *Mahābhārata*, the quarrel arose at the churning of the ocean, and yet Vālmīki, who describes this incident in the first book of the poem, does not mention it. Both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* say that when the *amrita* was produced from the ocean, a great fight took place between the gods and the demons for its possession. But at this point the stories diverge. The *Rāmāyana* says that the battle between them raged for many days, but in the end, thanks to a trick which Vishnu played, the demons were overcome and slain. The *Mahābhārata*, on the other hand, says that the demons got hold of the vessel and were about to drink the *amrita* and thus acquire immortality, when Vishnu suddenly assumed the guise of a lovely female, and began to make love to

them. In their devotion to the lady they forgot the *amrita* which the other gods at once seized. When the gods began to drink, Rāhu, a demon in the guise of a celestial, insinuated himself among them and managed to get some. He was discovered by the sun and moon, who reported the fact to Vishnu. That god at once cut Rāhu in two with his discus. Thus rose Rāhu's hatred for the Sun and Moon, which from time to time he tries to swallow, and in his effort causes the temporary eclipse of these two bodies.

Note 9

Rama's ancestry

In Book i. c. 70 of the *Rāmāyana*, Vasishtha, at the request of king Dasharatha, recounts the ancestry of the royal house. It begins as follows (see Dutt's translation, p. 159). 'The perpetual, ever-lasting and undeteriorating Brahmā sprang from the Un-manifest (Brahma). From him sprang Marichi; and Kashyapa is son unto Marichi. And from Kashyapa sprung Vivasvat; and Manu is son unto Vivasvat. This Manu is otherwise called Prajāpati; and Ikshwāku is Manu's son, and this Ikshwāku, thou must understand, was the first king of Ayodhyā.' The matter will be clearer if it is put in the form of a table with some of the more prominent kings who ruled between Ikshvāku and Rāma.[1] As Sagara, one of these kings, ruled for at least 60,000 years, and Dasharatha was 9,000 years old when Rāma was born, a very long period of time is involved.

Brahma: the Unmanifest.
Brahmā: the creator-god, first member of the Hindu trinity.
Marichi: one of the mind-born sons of Brahmā.
Kashyapa: according to the *Rāmāyana*, the father of gods, demons, beasts, birds, reptiles and men.
Vivasvat: the Sun, commonly called Sūrya.
Manu: the secondary creator of this present universe.
Ikshvāku: first king of Ayodhyā.
Kakutstha: the poem often calls Rāma, *Kakutstha's son.*
Trishanku: the hero, for whose elevation to heaven Vishvāmitra made such a bold fight, as recorded in Book i.
Sagara: it was Sagara's 60,000 sons, who dug down to hell, and whose death was the occasion of 30,000 years' asceticism on Sagara's part.
Anshumat: spent 32,000 years in asceticism on Himālayas.
Dilipa: reigned 30,000 years.

[1] At least thirty-five generations are shown in Dutt's translation, but Monier-Williams works out a total amounting to over sixty. See *Indian Wisdom*, p. 344.

Bhagīratha: his austerities brought down the Ganges from heaven.
Ambarīsha: 'twenty-ninth in descent from Trishanku'; it was he who purchased Shunashepha to offer him as a man-sacrifice. See Book i.
Raghu: Rāma is often called Rāghava, or son of Raghu.
Pravridha: the poem says that this prince fed on human flesh.
Nahusha: these two names appear in both of Vālmīki's lists.
Yayati: Two prominent kings so named appear in the Lunar Race of the *Mahābhārata*.
Nabhaga: grandfather of Dasharatha.
Aja: father of Dasharatha.
Dasharatha:
Rāma.

In virtue of its descent from Vivasvat or the Sun, the dynasty of Rāma is often spoken of as the Solar Race, in contrast to the royal heroes of the *Mahābhārata*, who are said to belong to the Lunar Race. There are still kings in India who claim to belong to the Solar Race. The poem more commonly speaks of Rāma as the descendant of Ikshvāku, the first king of Ayodhyā.

Note 10

The four ages

The four ages are spoken of throughout the *Rāmāyana*, but never with the detail and emphasis that we find in the *Mahābhārata*. Professor Dowson says that this elaborate and practically boundless system of chronology was invented between the age of the *Rig Veda* and that of the *Mahābhārata*, as there is no trace of it to be found in the hymns of the earlier work. By the time that the *Rāmāyana* began to be written, the love for long periods of time was however fully developed, when we find kings, who reigned for 30,000 years, and Brahmins, who served them and their fathers from generation to generation. Thus we find Vishvāmitra appearing as the friend and helper of Trishanku, and intervening twenty-nine generations later to rescue his nephew, Shunashepha, from the sacrifice of king Ambarīsha a descendant of Trishanku (see Note 9). The fact that we find more detailed references to the four ages in the *Uttarakānda* or Last Book of the *Rāmāyana* than in the earlier portion, may probably be used as an argument for its later date. Certainly, section 87 of that book writes of the four ages after the manner of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purānas*.

For the benefit of the general reader the names of the four ages and the years allotted to each are appended:

The Krita Yuga or Age, lasted for	...	1,728,000	years
The Tretā Yuga „ „	...	1,296,000	„
The Dwāpara Yuga „ „	...	864,000	„
The Kali Yuga will last for	...	432,000	„
Total	...	4,320,000	years

In some sections of the *Mahābhārata*, and in the *Purānas*, the chronology is still further developed. There the cycle of four ages sinks into insignificance, and we read of Manwantaras, and Kalpas. Seventy-one cycles of the four ages constitute a *Manwantara* or *period of a Manu*: and fourteen periods of a Manu form a *Kalpa*; a kalpa is a day of Brahmā, 4320 million years; a day of Brahmā is the time for which a world, when once created, lasts. At the end of that time, the world is dissolved, and Brahmā sleeps for a night of Brahmā which is equally long. When the night is over, he awakes to create the world anew. We are supposed to be living in the period of the seventh Manu, and half of Brahmā's life has expired. His life consists of 100 such nights and days. It is, however, quite impossible to obtain a consistent description of creation from either the *Epics* or the *Purānas*. For we are told that there have been separate creations of gods, demons, beasts and men during the periods of the different Manus, and though the *Mahābhārata* refers to Kalpas and Manus, it is sometimes content to speak of the four ages, as if that were the limits of creation. On the other hand, that epic asserts that the soul may have to suffer in Hell for many thousands of Kalpas, because the wheel of existence must endlessly revolve for everyone, gods and demons as well as beasts and men, except the soul that has become free.

NOTE 11

Om (Aum)

Monier-Williams suggests that the three letters AUM were originally the initial letters of the names of Fire, Wind and Sun, that is Agni, Vāyu and Mitra. In later times they were taken to typify Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva, the Hindu triad, who are concerned in the evolution, maintenance and disintegration of the universe (see pp. 10, 44, of *Brāhmanism and Hinduism*). The repetition of this monosyllable is supposed to be attended with marvellous results and the muttering of it with reflection on its

meaning is said to be conducive to a knowledge of the Supreme and as a preventive of all the obstacles to Yoga (*Indian Wisdom*, p. 93).

Gayatri or Savitri verse

The Gāyatrī or Sāvitrī verse is to be found in the *Rig Veda*, (Third Mandala, 62, 10). It is as follows in English: 'Let us meditate on that excellent glory of the divine vivifying Sun (Sāvitrī), may he enlighten our understandings.' It is the most sacred verse in all the Vedas and was considered to be possessed of great power. In Book 2. c. 6. we read that when Rāma finished his evening devotions, he began to recite the Sāvitrī with an intent mind (Dutt, p. 196).

Vashat-kara

In his Sanskrit Dictionary Monier-Williams says that *Vashat* is the exclamation used on making an oblation to a deity with fire. *Vashatkāra* means making the exclamation *Vashat*. In the first book (c. 65) Vishvāmitra says, 'Let *OMkāra* and *Vashatkāra* and the Vedas crown me.

Yoga

Comparatively little is said of the Yoga, and still less of any other system of Philosophy. But we come across references to the Yoga, such as this: 'O, cow of plenty, do thou create fresh troops through thy Yoga power' (Bk. i. 55.) 'According to Patanjali, the author of the system, the very word Yoga is interpreted to mean the act of 'fixing or concentrating the mind in abstract meditation' (*Indian Wisdom*, p. 92).

Note 12

Destiny *v* Human Effort

Reference has been made in the Introduction to the way in which the two epics compare the respective power of *Destiny* and *Human Effort*. In the earlier epic we find such passages as these: Trishanku says to Vishvāmitra (Book i, c. 58): 'I have performed a hundred sacrifices—but yet I do not obtain the fruit thereof. I have never before told an untruth! and I swear by my Kshatriya morality, that albeit fallen on evil days, I will never do so in future, O gentle one. And sacrifices I have celebrated many, and I have ruled my people in righteousness; and I have pleased

my preceptors by my character and conduct. But, O best of ascetics, now endeavouring to do my duty and intending to perform a sacrifice, I have failed in enlisting the good graces of my spiritual guides. Therefore do I consider Destiny as supreme; and action as nothing. Destiny overtaketh all: Destiny is the prime way. Therefore it behoveth thee to grant thy favour unto me extremely distressed, who crave thy favour, and, good betide thee, whose endeavours have been baffled by Destiny. Other way will I wend none; nor is there any other refuge for me. It behoveth thee to meet Destiny with exertion.'

In contrast to the above, take the following quotation from *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 184.

'In this connexion should be read a question put to Bhīshma in a later chapter, as to whether the *Karma* that any one acquires in this life, or the *Karma* acquired in past lives is the greater, that is, whether Exertion or Destiny is the more powerful influence. It is said that the god Brahmā himself declared that just as soil, however well tilled, yielded no fruit unless seed was sown, so in the same way, a man's destiny could not help him unless he was willing to exert himself. His deeds are the soil and destiny is the seed. It is the combination of soil and seed that yields a harvest. The gods themselves were what they were, because they had made an effort. The industrious man prospered. The lazy came to grief. An unfavourable destiny was not so great an evil as a man's own sloth. Destiny alone could do nothing for him. A man is his own best friend, and his own worst enemy. Destiny cannot harm the righteous man. It is to be remembered however that the gods sometimes try to defeat men's efforts out of jealousy and fear.

NOTE 13

Hanuman

Hanumān who rendered such efficient service to Rāma and Sītā, was, according to the poem, the son of Vāyu the Wind-god and a monkey mother. Thanks to his connexion with Rāma, he has become a very prominent god in later Hinduism. The *Rāmāyana* speaks of his eloquence and knowledge of Sanskrit. There is an interesting passage in the third book of the *Mahābhārata*, which represents him as an authority on religion and morality, and is worth quoting. 'One day when Bhīma went to gather lotuses for Draupadi, he found a monkey lying on the path in front of him. When the monkey would not get up, Bhīma tried to lift it by the tail, but though he used both hands, he could not move it. This was very wonderful, as on the way Bhīma had amused himself by

killing lions and tigers and elephants using dead elephants as a weapon to knock down and kill others. When Bhīma realized that this was no ordinary monkey, he asked it to declare who it was. The monkey told him that he was Hanumān, and also gave him an account of his adventures with Rāma. At Bhīma's repeated request Hanumān showed himself in his real gigantic shape, and discoursed for some time on the duties of the different castes. He also said that in the first age or Krita Yuga, there was no need of performing any religious act; there was no malice or pride, or any kind of sin: there were no gods or demons, Brahmā was attainable by all; all men were equal, and the four Vedas did not exist. In the Tretā age sacrifices were introduced, men clung close to virtue, and were devoted to asceticism. In the Dwāpara age the Vedas were divided into four parts, and virtue decreased by one-half. With the division of the sacred books, men became divided in opinions and in the observance of different religious rites. They became less devoted to truth and more subject to passion. Falling away from truth they became subject to disease and many other calamities. Selfishness alone prompted many to perform sacrifices and thus secure heaven. And lastly, the Kali Yuga came with only a quarter of virtue remaining. In this age all kinds of evil prevail; famine and disease, sloth and anger. Even religious acts have a contrary effect. Hanumān also explained the duties of the four castes, and added that the Brāhmin secures heaven by asceticism, the Vaishya by gifts and hospitality, and the Kshatriya by protecting men. As to the Shudra he was silent. Bhīma and Hanumān were both sons of the god Vāyu, and when they parted they embraced one another over and over again.

Note 14

The Demons

There are a variety of demons spoken of in the poem.

(1) The *Dānavas*, often referred to in conjunction with the gods as looking on at Rāma's deeds, were the descendants of the rishi Kashyapa, by his wife *Danu* (see Note 4).

(2) The *Daityas* were Kashyapa's children by another wife, *Diti*. The Daityas and Dānavas were the demons who waged war against the gods and disturbed their sacrifices at a time when, according to an old story, they were the elder brothers of the gods. Mr. Dowson says the Daityas and Dānavas are generally associated and are hardly distinguishable.

(3) The *Rāmāyana* also speaks of the *Asuras*. 'In the oldest parts of the *Rig Veda*, the term Asura is used for the supreme spirit, and is the same as the *Ahura* of the Zoroastrians. In the

sense of 'god' it was applied to several of the chief deities as to Indra, Agni and Varuna. It afterwards acquired an entirely opposite meaning and came to signify as now a demon or enemy of the gods (Dowson's *Hindu Classical Dictionary*, p. 27).

(4) The *Rākshasas*, of whom Rāvana was chief, were the descendents of Pulastya who, like Kashyapa, was one of the mind-born sons of Brahmā.

(5) The *Yakshas* are sometimes spoken of as associates of the Rākshasas, but they were generally reckoned as a more or less inoffensive class, the attendants of Kuvera the god of wealth.

(6) The *Pisāchas*, also referred to in the poem, are supposed to have been even worse than the Rākshasas. They were the vilest and most malignant order of malevolent beings. Kausalyā prays that Rāma may be protected from the terrible Pisāchas, intent on committing cruel deeds.

Note 15

Gandharvas and Apsarasas

The *Gandharva* of the *Veda*, says Dowson, 'was a deity who knew and revealed the secrets of heaven and divine truths in general.' In the *Mahābhārata* he is a sort of heavenly attendant who helps to pass the time with dance and song. They are always spoken of in connexion with Indra's heaven, a place, according to the epic, where gods and men were able to indulge themselves as much as they liked.

The *Apsarasas* are the celestial nymphs and they also are connected with Indra's heaven. They are referred to in the *Vedas*. They are said to have been produced at the churning of the Ocean. When they came out of the sea neither gods nor demons would have them as wives, and they thus became common to all. They were, as the *Mahābhārata* shows, persons of easy virtue. *The Forest Book* tells how Indra sent one of them called Urvasi to be at the disposal of Arjuna. The Pāndu rejected her advances, despite the fact that the nymph declared that all his ancestors dwelling in Indra's heaven enjoyed such favours without reproach.

Note 16

The Vedas

The writers of the *Rāmāyana* make many references to the *Vedas*. This general name however is made to include three very distinct component parts very far removed from one another in time as well as in thought.

I. There are first *the Hymns*, the Vedas proper. These hymns also vary greatly in age and purpose. They are (*a*) The *Rig-Veda Sanhitā*, the oldest, and to a very large extent the source from which the later collections of hymns were drawn. It is essentially a book of praise addressed to the nature gods of the early Aryans. (*b*) *The Sāma-Veda*, almost entirely composed of hymns drawn from the *Rig-Veda*. It was compiled for the use of priests at the great Soma sacrifice. (*c*) *The Yajur-Veda*. It also, though not to so great an extent, is based on the *Rig-Veda*, and was used by the priests who performed not only the Soma sacrifices, but others as well.

These are the '*three Vedas*' of which the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* so often speak. They were in existence and recognized as '*revelations*' long before (*d*) *the Atharva Veda* had been recognized or compiled. The *Atharva Veda*, says Professor Macdonell, 'only attained its present position after a long struggle. In spirit it is not only entirely different from the *Rig-Veda*, but though a later compilation, it represents a much more primitive stage of thought.' It is a hand-book of spells and cursings. It has to do with the gods of the lower world, and not with the kindly gods of the *Rig-Veda*, who are expected to bless their worshippers with children and cattle, health and happiness and length of days.

The Vedic period is believed to have begun as early as 1500 B.C., and the *Rig-Veda Sanhitā* to have largely taken its present shape by B. C. 1000.

II. The second portion of the *Vedas*, are the *Brāhmanas* written in prose. Their purpose is to explain the significance of the sacrificial ritual. These explanations, however, do not stand alone. The Brāhmanas also contain a large number of legends, and for that reason are of great value, as showing the changes that took place in the religious beliefs of the people of India.

It should be noted that the four sets of hymns have their corresponding Brāhmanas, while the dates assigned to them range from B. C. 800 to 500.

III. The *Upanishads* are reckoned as the third and final portion of the *Vedas*, hence the name which is sometimes given to them: *Vedānta* or *end of the Vedas*. 'The pantheistic groundwork of their doctrines was later developed into the Vedānta system, which is still the favourite philosophy of the modern Hindus . . . . They really represent a new religion, which is in virtual opposition to the ritual or practical side (Karma Kānda). Their aim is no longer the obtaining of earthly happiness and afterwards bliss in the abode of Yama, by sacrificing correctly to the gods, but release from mundane existence by the absorption of the individual soul in the world-soul through correct knowledge. Here therefore, the sacrificial ceremonial has become useless and speculative knowledge all-important. The essential theme of the

Upanishads is the nature of the world soul' (Macdonell's *Sanskrit Literature*, pp. 34, 318).

With the acceptance of pantheism and the belief that correct knowledge was the key to union with the world soul, went the theory of transmigration, which according to the above quoted authority is to be found in the oldest Upanishads.

The Upanishads probably began to be written about B. C. 600. Some of them are very late. There is even a Muhammadan treatise which claims the name! The three portions of the Vedas are all declared to be *Revelation* (Shruti) in contrast to other and later books which are termed *Tradition* (Smriti).

NOTE 17

The Mahabharata on Rama

In the third book of the *Mahābhārata*, cantos 273–291, we have a very brief summary of Rāma's exploits. Short as it is, it mentions most of the important events recorded in the *Rāmāyana*. The circumstances under which the story of Rāma's adventures came to be narrated are as follows. King Yudhisthira asked the rishi Mārkandeya if he had ever heard of any one who had been so unfortunate as he was. To this question Mārkandeya replied that an 'incomparable calamity had befallen Rāma.' His wife Sītā had been carried off to Lankā by a Rākshasa, and she was only recovered after a bridge had been built across the ocean and the demons' capital destroyed. Yudhisthira expressed a great desire to hear the story, and asked when this great hero had been born and what his father's name was. Mārkandeya thereupon proceeded with his story. The following facts should be noted. The four sons of Dasharatha are spoken of as having been born in the ordinary way, without any divine intervention, but it is said of Sītā, that the architect of the gods himself created her, that she might be Rāma's queen. In strange contrast to this brevity, we hear in detail of Rāvana's birth and asceticism and wars against the gods, there learning facts which are only mentioned in the seventh or last book of the *Rāmāyana*, which critics are disposed to reckon as spurious. Rāvana's grandfather, Pulastya had a son born of a cow, it is said, who under the name of Vaishravana (Kuvera) was endowed with immortality, by the kindness of the god Brahmā. As to Rāvana himself, he obtained his boon from that god also, in recognition of the fact that he stood on one leg for 1,000 years, living on air and surrounded by the five fires. At the end of that time he cast his ten heads into a sacrificial fire. Brahmā was so pleased with this devotion that he gave Rāvana his ten heads back, and promised that, though he would not make him immortal, he should be safe from all attacks save those of men. Rāvana's two

brothers, Vibhishana and Kumbhakarna had also practised austerities. In recognition of their piety they each obtained the boon they craved. The former asked that, even in the hour of great calamity, he might have 'no inclination for impiety, and be endowed with the light of divine knowledge.' Kumbhakarna prayed for long and lasting sleep. Rāvana's boon quickly filled him with pride and he began to fight against the gods and Asuras. When these beings complained to Brahmā, the deity replied, 'Rāvana's death is near. For this purpose and at my command, the four-headed god has already been incarnated. Vishnu, the foremost of repressors, shall accomplish this.' Brahmā added that the gods must also take their birth on earth and beget, on monkeys and bears, heroic and powerful sons, able to help Vishnu. To bring their purpose to a successful issue a female Gandharva, called Dundhubhi, was also sent down to earth to be born as the hunch-back Manthara, the temptress of Kaikeyi.

The reader will observe that nothing is said of Rāma's boyish deeds, his bending the bow of Shīva, of Sitā's birth from a furrow or of Rāma's three brothers being sharers in the divine essence of Vishnu. It is equally silent as to the wonderful tales which Rāma heard from Vishvāmitra and other holy men.

Mārkandeya then proceeds to tell of Dasharatha's wish to see Rāma seated on his throne; of Kaikeyi, moved by Manthara, seeking for a boon; of Rāma being driven to the forest; Dasharatha's death; Bharata's refusal of the sovereignty; his pursuit of Rāma to his place of exile; his return to Nandigrāma, and his placing of Rāma's sandals before him. The reader will best understand the nature of the summary if I give a quotation from Dutt's translation of the *Mahābhārata* describing Rāma's life in the forest. 'And Rāma, too, afraid of the return of the people of the city and provinces, (that is to persuade him to go back and assume the sovereignty) entered into the mighty forest of Dandaka, near the hermitage of Sharabhanga. Paying adoration to Sharabhanga, and taking refuge in the Dandaka forest, he began to dwell on the banks of the beautiful river Godavari. While dwelling there, Rāma had great enmity with Khara who had his abode in Janasthāna, on account of Shurpanakhā. The descendant of Raghu, devoted to virtue, slew 14,000 of Rākshasas on earth, for the protection of the ascetics. And the intelligent Rāghava, having slain the highly powerful Khara and Dushana, restored peace to that sacred forest. Those Rākshasas being slain, Shurpanakhā, with her nose and lips cut off, returned to Lankā the abode of her brother Rāvana.'

It is after this fashion that Mārkandeya tells his story, which need not be repeated here. But one or two differences in the later narrative deserve to be recorded. When Indrajīt made himself invisible, Vibhishana gave Rāma and Lakshmana, as well as the foremost monkeys, an eyewash by which they could see invisible

things, and as a result see the invisible Indrajīt. That distinguished warrior had shortly before wounded Rāma and Lakshmana so grievously that they fell to the earth. Their bodies were covered with a network of arrows, which made them look like 'birds confined in a cage.' They were 'restored to consciousness' by the ingenuity of Vibhishana, who employed a weapon named Prajna, which achieved that end. The next verse however speaks of a highly potent medicine, aided by celestial mantras, as being responsible for this happy result. Nothing is said of Hanumān going to the Himālayas, for the herb which grew there, and his bringing back both herb and mountain. When Sītā was rescued from her prison house, Rāma disowns her after the manner Vālmīki speaks of. He said he had done his duty in removing her from the clutches of Rāvana, but she could now go where she liked. Men like him could not accept, for even a moment, a woman carried off by another. Whether she was of pure or impure character, he would not dare to enjoy her. She was like 'sanctified butter, lapped by a dog.' The gods at this stage, with Dasharatha, appeared on the scene, while Sītā asked air, fire, water, space and earth to forsake her life, if she had ever thought of any one but Rāma even in her dreams. When Sītā had said this, a sacred and auspicious voice was heard from heaven, and Vāyu, Agni, Varuna and Brahmā, one after the other, assured Rāma of Sītā's purity, and urged him to receive his wife. Brahmā said he was not surprised at Rāma's hesitation, but he assured him that the demon, afraid of a curse uttered against him by Nalakuvera, had never dared to violate a woman against her will. The curse was to the effect that, if he ever did so, his head would split into a hundred fragments. Brahmā further explained that it was for his own destruction that Rāvana carried off Sītā. Brahmā does not suggest, nor do any of the other gods suggest, that Rāma is an incarnation of Vishnu. He merely calls him, 'O highly resplendent one, O creature of divine effulgence,' and says, 'You have indeed done a great service to the gods by slaying Rāvana.' The reader will observe that Sītā did not enter the fire or address herself to Agni.

The summary thereafter quickly records Rāma's return to Ayodhyā, in the car Pushpaka; his meeting with Bharata and his coronation as king. Nothing is said of Sītā's second repudiation, or of Rāma's subsequent career, save that, assisted Vasishtha, he celebrated ten horse-sacrifices and gave more than three times the usual gifts to Brāhmins.

In the seventh book (c. 59) and the twelfth book (c. 29) where the same story is told twice in more or less similar words, the rishi Nārada, when seeking to comfort a king called Sringaya, on the death of his son, dwells on the fact that death is the inevitable lot of every man, and in support of his argument mentions a great many famous kings who lived in former days. Among these kings,

whose deeds he briefly relates, he speaks of Rāma son of Dasharatha, his sufferings, his victories, his many sacrifices, his long reign of 11,000 years, and the happiness and virtues of his subjects.[1] It is said that when he died at last, he took his subjects belonging to all the four orders, with him to heaven. In neither book is any reference made to him as an incarnation of the god Vishnu. But he is spoken of as the *Lord Rāma*. However, as Dr. Muir remarks, (O.S.T. vol. iv. p. 479) the word *Ishwara* applied to him may mean only *lord* and need not be employed in the sense of *god*. Certainly what is told of other kings in these chapters is equally remarkable.

In the twelfth book (c. 339 and c. 340) we have two other references. When Nārada made his remarkable visit to the White Island and saw the white men who were effulgent like the Sun, and joined in their worship of Nārāyana, the Supreme Soul of the universe, that deity declared that towards the end of the Tretā and the beginning of the Dwāpara age, he would take birth as Rāma, son of Dasharatha in Ikshvāku's race. Strange to say, in the previous chapter, (339) this event is spoken of as having already taken place, when Nārāyana is told by his worshipper, 'You are the monkey that carried Rāma on his shoulders.' But the *Mahābhārata* is not remarkable for consistency. See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 179 for both these references.

Note 18

The Ramayana of Tulsidas

The *Rāmcharitmanas* of Tulsidās (composed circa 1575 A.D.) is sometimes incorrectly spoken of as a Hindi version of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyana*. But it is an entirely independent work. No doubt, Tulsidās used the material of the earlier poem; the characters and incidents of both are to a large extent the same; but the motive is very different. In the interval that elapsed between the composition of the two poems, the doctrine of *bhakti*, faith in or devotion towards a particular deity, had undergone a great development. And the whole work of Tulsidās is an impassioned appeal to his readers to cast themselves at Rāma's feet. Mr. Growse, who has made a most accurate and beautiful translation of the poem, also dwells on the fact that the poet had grown weary of the virtual atheism of philosophical Hindu theology, and felt the urgent need of believing that the Supreme Being was a personal God. 'Let

[1] It says that even the women never quarrelled with one another, not to speak of the men.

others adore the unembodied Supreme, the primary existence whom the Vedas hymn; but my desire is the king of Kosala, the divine Rāma visible and material.' 'Worshippers of the incarnate are not rewarded with annihilation, but Rāma gives them devotion to himself.' This faith he centres on the son of Dasharatha, whom he declares to be God, the totality of God, imperishable, invisible uncreated, incomparable, void of all change, indivisible, but who has taken the form of man and performs human actions, out of the love he bears to his faithful people and to earth and Brāhmins and cows and the gods. And in his prayers to this loving deity, he cries, 'Dwell in his heart, Oh, Rāma, who is unmoved by lust, anger, pride or arrogance, and is without covetousness, fraud and hypocrisy, who is careful to say what is both true and kind, who, waking and sleeping, has no other friend but you.' 'They who never ask for anything but simply love you, in their hearts, abide for ever, for that in your very home.'

As one reads these words, one is tempted to forget that though he thus singles out Rāma as the centre of his love and devotion and calls him the totality of God, Tulsidās has not, by any means, abandoned his belief in other gods, or in what one might call the other articles of the Hindu creed. Many pages are devoted to the praise of Brahmā, Ganesh, Sarasvati, Shiva and Parvati, the Ganges and the Jumna. But it is to Shiva, in particular, that the poet always returns. That god, so different in character to Vishnu, occupies a large place in the poem. It is true that Shiva 'the blessed god of curst attire acquired immortality by the power of Rāma's name,' and that 'he wanders about the earth with his heart fixed on Hari,' but at the same time he is spoken of as Shankar, the universally adored and sovereign lord, to whom gods, men and saints all bow the head; while Rāma tells a penitent rishi to go 'and repeat Shankar's hundred names. There is no one so dear to me as Shiva. He who loves not Shiva's lotus feet can never dream of pleasing Rāma.' It is the god Shiva too, who tells the story of Rāma's wanderings. His wife, Parvati, had said she could not understand how Rāma, son of Dasharatha, could be the Supreme God, and the deity set himself to solve her doubts. It is interesting to find that Shiva gives three explanations for Vishnu's incarnation in human form.

(1) In the first, it was the result of a curse uttered against him by the rishi Nārada. As a punishment for pride Vishnu had made Nārada as ugly as a monkey and caused the holy man, as he thought, to lose the hand of a king's daughter. The angry saint therefore cursed the god to be born on earth, with monkeys as his helpers and distressed for the loss of his wife.

(2) The second explanation was that Manu, as a reward for many thousand years of asceticism, was told that he would appear again on earth as Dasharatha king of Ayodhyā and that Vishnu would be born as his son.

(3) The third was the usual explanation, to overcome the power of Rāvana, but the demon's origin is differently accounted for. He is said to have been in a former birth a pious king, who by the wiles of an enemy was subjected to the curse of the Brāhmins. Though a voice from heaven told the Brāhmins that the king was not to blame, they expressed no regret. They merely replied that the past could not be changed. A Brāhmin's curse, once uttered, could not be annulled.

The reader of Vālmīki's poem has been accustomed to find that the gods were frequently in a state of alarm when demons and saints rose to any special height of asceticism, and in their jealous fear songht to rob them of the merit they had won. But one is surprised to find that Tulsidās pictures the gods as constantly envious of Rāma's happiness and goodness. From the day that Rama brought back his bride, they sought to do him harm. They went to Sarasvati, and said that they would never be happy till Rāma had been sent into exile. The goddess declared that the gods were 'a mean-spirited crew; though they dwelt on high, their thoughts were low.' They could not endure to see another's prosperity. Although she disapproved of their conduct, she however agreed to help them, and it was at her instigation that the maid servant and Kaikeyi procured Rāma's banishment. All through the poem, the jealousy of the gods appears, especially Indra, of whom Rāma says, 'Indra is like a dog in his ways.' Tulsidās speaks of *Destiny* in more hopeless language than the earlier poet. Sītā says, 'Fate is cruel, I am blameless.' And the citizens say, 'How goodly a plan God has made, and now has marred. His doings are all perverse. He is utterly incontrollable, cruel and remorseless.' No doubt we are told that Brahmā, Shiva and Fate are all obedient to Rāma and that if Rāma is against you not even in hell can you find a resting place. But this is the predominant teaching, or as it is put in one place, Rāma himself has made Fate sovereign of the Universe.

In conclusion, it may be added, that Tulsidās says nothing of Sītā's second repudiation. Husband and wife live happily together for many years. Kusha and Lava are born, not in a hermitage, but in a palace. Nor do we hear of the translation of Rāma, his brothers and friends to heaven. The most of the seventh book is devoted to lengthy discourses on the values of knowledge and faith, and the mysterious power of Māyā or illusion, in which a crow called Kāka-bhusundi, who had lived through twenty-seven cycles of the universe, plays a leading part.

NOTE 19

The immorality of the gods

In a summary that endeavours to give a more or less full description of all the incidents in the poem, feelings of decency have rendered it necessary to omit entirely any account of certain cantos in the first and seventh books. It is true that such stories can be paralleled in the mythologies of Greece. But when Greece had passed beyond the mythological stage, both poets and philosophers rejected as unworthy and degrading such legendary tales. The remarkable fact about India is that having reached, so early in her spiritual history, moral heights attained by few other countries, she was content not only to record without disapproval, but to retain as part of her religious beliefs, a system of thought which, apart from its demoralizing effects, was bound to result in arrested development. And that is what one realizes in this poem. The story about Umā, the descriptions of the births of Kārtikeya, Agastya and Vasishtha, the adultery of Indra and Ahalyā, with their obscene and repulsive details, are recorded in a poem which has few equals in its praise of modesty and sexual purity. There is apparently one code of morality for gods and another for men. When the curse of Gautama had made Indra a eunuch, that crestfallen deity, 'his eyes tremulous with fear,' told his brother gods that they must devise some plan whereby his manhood would be restored. His argument for their coming to his relief was not that he had repented of his sin, but that he had rendered the gods a service. He had roused the anger of the injured husband and thus deprived him of his ascetic merit.[1]

That these ugly incidents caused disquiet to the minds of men in later days is a matter for satisfaction. But the way in which they eased their consciences is not so satisfactory. Instead of disowning such deities, and demanding that God must be a God of purity and righteousness, the excuse was offered that superior beings and gods were above the moral law. An interesting account of some of these attempts will be found in Dr. Muir's *Original Sanskrit Texts*, vol. iv. pp. 48–53. For example, one commentator 'explains allegorically not only the dalliance of Brahmā with his own daughter, but also the adultery of Indra with Ahalyā,' while another,

[1] As being less objectionable in many respects than the other stories the account of how the gods came to Indra's relief is submitted briefly in Latin.

Imprecato autem Gautama scrotum Indrae humi cecedit. Qui pertenitus ad alios deos progressus, rogavit atque obsecravit qui scrotum redderent, se cum vim et vigorem sancti destruisset praemio dignum esse. Di, igitur, cum ad manes arietem adportavissent, locuti sunt. 'Hujus arietis scrotum arreptum Indrae date. Aries, autem, scroto amitto, in vos beneficia praeclara conferre poterit.' Quae cum Manes fecissent, scrotum ariete avulsum Indrae corpori adjunxerunt. Quo a tempore manes arietes, qui scrota non habeant, ederunt; Indra autem etiamnunc scrotum arietis habet.

in reference to Indra's appeal to the gods to have pity on him in his degraded condition, says, 'What follows is said to show what was the ground of Indra practising unrighteousness, though he is the supporter of righteousness.' In the case of Krishna, Dr. Muir remarks, 'The author of the *Bhāgavata Purāna* attempts to quiet the scruples of some of the purer minded among the devotees of the pastoral deity and to vindicate his morality, by seeking to impart a mystic character to those loose adventures which had been the occasion of scandal to them, though, no doubt, well suited to the taste of his coarser worshippers.' The passage from the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, in which that attempt is made, is quoted by Dr. Muir in full. We shall give a part of the quotation. 'The king said: The divine lord of the world became partially incarnate for the establishment of virtue, and the repression of its opposite. How then, did he, the expounder, author and guardian of the bulwarks of righteousness, practise its contrary; the corrupting of other men's wives? With what object did the lord of the Yadus (Krishna) perpetrate what was blameable? Resolve, devout saint, this our doubt. Suka said: The transgression of virtue and the daring acts which are witnessed in superior beings must not be charged as faults to those glorious persons, even as no blame is imputed to fire, which consumes fuel of every description. The word of superior beings is true and so also their conduct is sometimes (correct): let a wise man observe their command which is right. These beings, O king, who are beyond the reach of personal feelings, have no interest in good deeds done in this world, nor do they incur any detriment from the contrary. How much less can there be any relation of good or evil between the lord of all beings, brute, mortal and divine, and the creatures over whom he rules? (i.e. since he is entirely beyond the sphere of virtue and vice, how can any of his actions partake of the nature of either?)

Since Munis (ascetics) who are satisfied by worshipping the pollen from the lotus of his feet, and by the force of abstraction have shaken off all the fetters of works, since even they are uncontrolled and act as they please, how can there be any restraint upon him (the Supreme Deity) when he has voluntarily assumed a body?

This quotation, of course, raises the further horrid fact, that particularly *holy men* were reckoned to be above the moral law. In conclusion the story of Vasishthā's second birth reveals with special plainness that the Apsarases or heavenly nymphs were at the disposal of the gods. The society of these celestial harlots is from time to time held out as one of the attractions of the upper world. What a contrast to the pure minded Rāma, of whom it is said that after Sītā's translation, he did not marry again.

NOTE 20

Vishnu and his descents

Vishnu, the second member of the Hindu tri-murti or triple manifestation of the Supreme Being (of which Brahmā the *creator*, and Shiva, the *destroyer* are the other two), is, as the reader will have observed, frequently identified with the Supreme, or he is at least declared to include all the other gods and their qualities within himself. This fact, however, did not prevent the devotees of other gods from declaring that their favourite deity also was the Supreme. The *Mahābhārata*, for instance, contains within its comprehensive bosom, long passages which proclaim in impartial rotation the exclusive virtues of Vishnu and Shiva, while there are Purānas which have been composed in praise of Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva respectively. It is natural that Vishnu, as the *preserver* of the universe, should intervene in mundane affairs, when his presence and help would be of value to the world. And we therefore find that his divine essence in whole or in part has already descended nine times and a tenth descent is yet to take place. Most of these descents (avatāra) are referred to in the *Rāmāyana*. They are as follows:

(1) *Matsya* or the fish. To save Manu and the seven rishis at the flood. The fish ordered Manu to build an ark and afterwards towed it over the raging waters. See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 86.

(2) *Kurma* or the tortoise. This was at the churning of the ocean, when *amrita* was recovered. Both the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* tell this story. It was on the back of Vishnu in the guise of a tortoise that Mt. Mandar, the churning stick, was placed.

(3) *Varāha* or the boar. When the world became submerged beneath the ocean, Vishnu, in the form of a boar, raised it up on his tusks. One story has it that a demon had seized the earth and carried it down to the lowest depths. The *Mahābhārata* (Book III) says that, owing to Brahmā not causing the death of any creature, the world got overcrowded and over-weighted. The *Rāmāyana* (II. 110) makes only the briefest reference and attributes the act to Brahmā. 'Then Brahmā, in a boar's disguise, bade from the deep, this earth arise' (Griffith, p. 219). These three descents were all in the earliest literature attributed to Brahmā, but at a later period transferred to Vishnu, and are said to have taken place in the first age of the world.

(4) *Nara-singha*, or the man-lion; to deliver the world from the power of a demon, Hiranya-Kashipu, to whom Brahmā had given the boon that he could not be slain by god, animal or man. The demon's son Prahlāda was a worshipper of Vishnu, and would have been destroyed by his father had the god not emerged from a pillar in a shape that was neither wholly human nor wholly

animal. It is referred to very briefly in the *Rāmāyana* on more than one occasion.

(5) *Vāmana*, or the dwarf; to deceive the demon Bali, who had obtained control over the three worlds, Vishnu, in the form of a dwarf, asked for as much ground as he could cover in three steps. When his prayer was granted, he covered earth and heaven in two steps. Unfortunately he took pity on the demon and refrained from covering hell with his third step. The *Rāmāyana* frequently refers to Vishnu covering the universe in three steps.

(6) *Parashu Rāma*, or Rāma with the axe. The second or warrior caste had been lording it over the Brāhmins. Vishnu was born as the son of Jamad-agni, a Brāhmin, to tame their pride. Both the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* refer to this descent. The second book of the *Rāmāyana* tells of Rāma's strange encounter with Parashurāma. The *Mahābhārata* says that he killed all the Kshatriyas to be found on earth no less than twenty-one times and filled five lakes with their blood.

(7) *Rāma* son of Dasharatha, the subject of this poem, came to slay the demon Rāvana, the oppressor of gods and men. He is said to have been born towards the end of the second of the four ages.

(8) *Krishna* was born that he might slay the cruel Kansa. He plays a large part in the *Mahābhārata*. His death marks the close of the third age.

(9) *Buddha*. This incarnation was not thought of at the time the *Rāmāyana* was composed. 'Vishnu assumed the form of the great sceptical philosopher in the fourth age of the world, to delude the Daityas or demons, into neglecting the worship of the gods and thus exposing themselves to destruction' (*Indian Wisdom*, p. 333). The *Vishnu Purāna* (iii, 17 and 18) gives a full account of how the demons were deceived by 'many specious arguments, teaching that the same thing might be for the sake of virtue and of vice' (see Dutt's Translation, pp. 225, 236). This objectionable theory was most likely invented when Buddhism was expelled from India. It reveals the feelings which possessed the triumphant Brāhmins.

(10) *Kalki*. In this avatāra, Vishnu is to appear, riding on a white horse, with a drawn sword in his hand and slaying the wicked. It is to take place at the close of the present evil age (Kali-yuga). He will re-establish righteousness and a race will arise which will practice the laws of the golden or first age of the world (see *Vishnu Purāna*, iv, 24).

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INDEX

ACTS, fruit and power of, 9, 69.
See also *Karma*, and *Transmigration*.
Adite, mother of gods, wife of Kashyapa, 37, 116, 143, 286, note 3.
Adityas, sons of Aditi, 5, 143, 286, 315.
twelve Adityas, 193, 336, note 3.
Adultery, greatest sin, 13, 101, 104, 139, 151.
Agastya, rishi, 7, 20, 24, 31, 80, 281, 309, 335.
eats a demon, 141, 194.
gods at his hermitage, 142.
teaches Rama hymn to Sun, 267.
Ages, the four, 37, 57, 224, 241, 307, note 10.
Agni, god of fire, 5, 19, 26, 28, 50, 68, 205, 223, 260, 323.
rescues Sita from fire, 274.
Agnihotra sacrifice, 242, 268.
Agnishtoma do. 240 341.
Ahalya, wife of Gautama, 6.
seduced by god Indra, 12, 40, 341, note 19.
Air-chariots, 4, 5, 148, 154, 200, 219, 267, 273, 275, 323.
Ajmere, city in Rajputana, 49.
Ambarisha, king of Ayodhya, 49, 51.
Amrita, drink of gods, 28, 37, 39, 248.
Ananta, snake worshipped by all gods, 193.
Anarchy, dangers of, 16, 68, 99, 107.
Anasuya, wife of Atri, 14, 134.
Anger, 8, 12, 13, 19, 36, 44, 53, 78, 187, 189, 222, 236, 296, 299.
Animals sacrificed, see sacrifices.
killed needlessly. 26, 87, 312.
hunting of, allowed, 86, 88, 90, 92, 95, 182.
sacred, 68.
flesh eaten, 72, 90, 92, 110, 114, 115, 180.
men changed into, 294, 301.
men changed into demons, 297.
Ansuman, grandson of SAGARA, 33, note 9.
Apsarases, heavenly nymphs, 28, 38, 113, 165, 183, 288, 320, 337, note 15, 19.
Ashwins, Vedic deities, 5, 143, 193, 205, note 3.
Asuras, demons, elder brothers of gods, 32, 38, 154, 218, 245, 248, 293, 302, 311, 322, 337, note 14.
Ascetics go direct to heaven, 137, 138, 167.
Asceticism, power of, 3, 5, 8, 11, 12, 13, 24, 32, 35, 39, 45, 46, 56, 75, 154, 166, 175, 178, 207, 218, 319, 335, 336.
its power doubled, 96.
sitting between five fires, 11, 35, 52, 137, 336.
living on air and rays of moon, 137, 140, 335.
no moral influence, 210, 335, 336.
gods afraid of, 11, 27, 39, 52, 140.
for 10,000 years, 140, 207.
for 30,000 years, 35.
to procure offspring, 32, 111.
Vishvamitra's, 45.
Ravana's, 336.
not open to Shudras, 308.
Atharva Veda, see Vedas.
Atheists, 100, 129, 131, 180, note 6.
Atri, a prajapati or secondary creator, 14, 133, 281, 296, note 4.
Auspicious marks, 247.
Avatara, descent or incarnation, note 20.
Ayodhya (near Fyzabad) home of Rama, 1, 2, 6, 15, 20.
Rama's return to, 276.
citizens go to heaven with Rama, 322.
described, 324.
Ayur-veda, science of medicine, 38.

BALI, a demon, 30, 193, 334, 339, note 20.
Bali, a monkey, son of Indra, 28, 165, 169, 173, 342.
Barbara, barbarians, Greek barbaroi, 43.
Bear, constellation of Great, 76.
Bears, gods become fathers of, 3, 28, 165, 191.
at Rama's coronation, 278.
go to heaven with Rama, 322.
Beads, string of, 340.
Bent virgins, story of, 139.
Bharadwaja, a sage, 91, 281, 315, 335.
his great miracle, 113, 276.

Bharata, partial incarnation of Vishnu, brother of Rama.
his birth, 28.
refuses throne, 102, 108.
acts as regent, 132.
hands back regency, 277.
secures a kingdom, 318.
goes to heaven, 322.
Bhagiratha brings Ganges down from heaven, 35.
Bhrigu, a prajapati or secondary creator, 58, 296.
curses Vishnu, 293, 299, note 4.
Bhur, bhuvah, Svar the Gayatris, 7.
Boar, Vishnu's incarnation as, 3,274, 333, note 20.
Boons granted, 3, 19, 27, 29, 35, 39, 64, 135, 148, 157, 164, 195, 198, 199, 235, 246, 336, 337, 341.
Bow of Shiva, 55.
of Vishnu, 58, 142.
of Varuna, 82.
of Indra, 20.
Brahma, neuter Supreme Soul of universe, 13, 76, 99, note 9.
Brahmā masculine, first member of Hindu triad, the creator, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 13, 22, 26, 27, 33, 35, 45, 51, 55, 58, 76, 80, 93, 142, 157, 193, 198, 201, 207, 230, 297, 315, 317, 322, 328, 342, notes 2, 9.
his four faces, 221.
as grandfathers, 128, 235, 253, 323.
best of all the gods, 160.
his views quoted, 189.
appoints good and evil, 241.
intervenes on behalf of Sita, 273, 316.
hymns Rama, 333.
his heaven, 126, 137, 138, 193, 294, 317, 323.
grants boons, 2, 135, 148, 157, 164, 195, 198, 199, 246, 253, 309, 336, 337, 341.
born from Vishnu's navel, 282, 301.
saves Ravana from death, 339, 340.
Brahmins the highest of the four castes, their pre-eminence, 6, 16, 17, 21, 23, 41, 43, 44, 54, 59, 61, 63, 73, 76, 86, 113, 116, 131, 146, 299, 307.
worshipped, 287.
power of, 11, 42, 293, 295, 296.
sin of killing, 73, 96, 180, 307, 311.
sin of stealing from, 101.
priests of demons, 231.
preside at sacrifice, 46.
obedience to, highest duty, 73, 80, 302.
gifts to, 6, 26, 57, 63, 76, 80, 90, 105, 278, 295.
Vishnu, manifest in all, 274.
origin, note 4.
Bridge built between India and Ceylon, 228, 237, 257.
Brihaspati, priest of gods, 76, 91, 121, 125, 300, 327.
Buddha, Vishnu's incarnation as, 3, 131, note 20.

CASTE, the four castes (or colours) 17, 21, 23, 109, 129, 277, 286, 325.
mixture of, by intermarriage, 17, 96.
origin of four, 143, 341, note 4.
twice born (first three castes) 62, 63, 68, 76, 81, 96, 99, 131, 180, 277, 278.
out-castes, 18, 46, 166.
Ceylon (Lanka) 2, 15.
Chandalas, lowest of out-castes.46,166.
Charanas, celestial bards, 238, 340.
Charvakas, materialists, 130, note 6.
Children, sale of, for sacrifice, 49.
Churning of ocean, 37.
Civilization advanced, 17, 63, 68, 80, 83,98, 109, 114, 201, 313, 324.
Colour (varna) Sanskrit word for caste. q.v.
Coronation ceremonies, 63, 186, 269, 278.
Countries, list of, 192.
Courtesans, 24, 83.
Cows, gift of, 6, 26, 49, 57, 80, 90, 97. 276, 281, 295.
sacredness of, 9, 84, 268.
cow of plenty, 42.
Vishnu manifest in all, 274.
sin of killing, 73, 180, 189.
of injuring, 86, 104.
of robbing them of calves, 84.
sacrifice, of 92.
give pleasure to, 146.
killed by a rishi, 73, 235.
Creation, account of, 143.
Cremation, 15, 79 98, 105, 162, 185.
Crow, the wonderful, 119, 216, 227.
Curses, power of, 29, 38, 40, 46, 47, 50, 53, 83, 96, 97, 101, 136, 154, 164, 175 232, 253, 293, 295, 296, 297, 302, 319, 335, 340, note 3.
injure those who utter them, 139, 209, 296, 338.
never fail, 254.

DAITYAS, a class of demons, q.v. sons of Diti, 143, 316, 337, note 14.
Daksha a Prajapati, born from Brahma's toe, 134, 143, note 2, 4.
sacrifice of, 4, 55, notes 7.
Danavas, a class of demons, q.v. 148. 161, 195, 230, 242, 253, 316, note 14.

Dandaka forest, 20, 70, 134, 138.
Dasharatha, father of Rama, 2, 8, 19, 23, note 9,
his foolish boon, 64, his sins, 95, his death, 98.
appears after death, 274.
his ministers, note 5.
Dead, spirits of, 7, 63, 65, 104, 128, 270, 287, 339.
appear, 97, 274.
raised to life, 275, 309.
offerings to the, 105, 123, 124, 131, 163, 270.
Debts, the three, 63, 128.
Demons, older brothers of gods, 39, note 14.
their wars with gods, 2, 12, 27, 37, 38, 64, 133, 210, 230, 231, 311, 336, 337.
prayer to demons, 76.
assaults on holy men, 20, 27, 31, 133, 135, 254.
practise asceticism, 3 12, 26, 135, 149, 150, 254, 311, 336.
change shapes at will, 29, 141, 152, 153, 199, 217, 242.
moralize, 149, 150.
offer sacrifices, 260.
study Vedas, and pray, 201, 206, 217, 219, 222, 231, 265.
eat human flesh, 31, 135, 141, 150, 254, 337.
drink human blood, 232, 256.
Destiny, see Fate.
Dhanwantari, physician of gods, 38.
Dharna, practice of, 132, 306.
Diti, wife of Kashyapa, mother of demons (Daityas), 37, 38, 143, 169, note 4.
Dog appeals to Rama, 298.
Dreams, 100, 210.
Drinking customs, 88, 115, 187, 189, 203, 206, 211, 214, 226, 288.
liquor forbidden to Brahmins, 67.
Doubts, religious, 72, 84.
Durvasa, a rishi, son of Atri, 38, 293, 315, 319.
his bad temper, 320.
Duty (Dharma), 73, 120, 126, 127.
Dwapara, third of the four ages, 295, 307, note 10.
Dwarf, incarnation of Vishnu, 3, 30, 193, 198, 286, 333, 339, note 20.

EARTH and all things in Vishnu's belly, 301.
Earth goddess, 316, 322.
Eclipses, 162, 179, 200, note 8.
Effort, result of human, 10, 46, 74, 230, note 12.
Elephants, four immortal, 33.
Eunuchs, 322.
Indra made a eunuch, 12, 40, note 19.

FATHER, a god, 69.
Falsehood, sin of, 13, 189.
Famine, 16, 21.
Fasting, merits of, 6, 35, 40, 52, 53, 63, 72, 75, 76, 319, see asceticism.
Fate, 8, 66, 72, 73, 102, 107, 146, 160, 179, 184, 185, 205, 233.
greater than the gods, 8, 46, 112, 126, 162.
v. human effort, 74, note 12.
the fire of, 44–179.
Fire, the sacred, 6, 13, 25, 57, 71, 87, 105, 107, 113, 141, 202.
self immolation in, 13, 14, 21, 79, 184, 205, 273.
god of, see Agni.
offering to, 26, 286, 341, 3.
Fish, Vishnu's incarnation as, 3, note 20.
Flags and banners, 60, 63.
Flesh, eating, 72, 90, 92, 214, 288.
offered to gods, 6.
offered to spirits of dead, 163.
Flowers fall from heaven, 4, 29, 41, 114, 198, 269, 278, 309, 320, 323, 338.
Foods, lawful and unlawful, 180.
Forest dwellers, 5, 11, 20, 24, 40, 49, 75, 91.
secure heaven, 118.
Fortune tellers, 247.
Funeral ceremonies, 66, 129, 163, 183, 186, 270, 279.
cake, 124.

GANDHARVAS, minstrels of gods, 113, 136, 142, 161, 165, 184, 192, 193, 210, 225, 283.
fight with Ravana, 337, note 15.
Ganges, sacred river, goddess, 6, 32, 41, 68, 88, 110, 134, 156, 191, 237, 290.
descent from heaven, 34, 90.
prayers to, 327.
Garuda, great bird, vehicle of Vishnu, 27, 34, 125, 142, 148, 226.
heals Rama, 248.
Gautama rishi, curses Indra to become a eunuch, 40, 278, 296, 301, 341.
Gayatri verse, 7, 63, 142, 322, note 11.
Godavari river, 11, 142, 154, 159, 163, 191.
Gods of the Ramayana, 4.
in council, 2, 27, 33, 156.
come in person, 4, 13, 21, 22, 31, 36, 41, 59, 93, 114, 137, 142, 146, 155, 200, 219, 238, 264, 267, 273, 315.

rain down flowers, 4, 29, 41, 114, 198, 269, 278, 309, 320, 323, 338.
fight with demons, 2, 12, 27, 37, 38, 64, 210, 245, 248, 260, 292.
the immorality of the gods, note 19.
afraid of men and demons, 5, 12, 19, 20, 33, 47, 52, 140, 147, 154, 231, 242, 304, 338.
tempt men to evil, 5, 11, 40, 52, 53, 94, 139, 140.
character of, 12, 31, 33, 39, 40, 53.
kind gods held in contempt, 160.
experience joy and sorrow, 162.
their worship, 5, 39, 44, 51, 60, 63, 69, 71, 75, 77, 92, 111, 113, 198, 205.
change themselves into animals, 338.
exhaust their merit, 9.
accept offerings, 124, 125.
can't eat food of low castes, 247.
Vishvamitra's threat to make new, 43.
Rama threatens, 8, 160.
how to recognize a, 157, 213.
men becomes gods, 161, 166.
gods become fathers of bears and monkeys, 3, 28, 165.
the thirty-three gods, 33, 65, 193, 210, note 3.
Shiva and Vishnu, fight, 58.
household gods, 93, 286.
vedic gods, 4, notes 3, 7.
Gold, gifts of, 25, 26, 57, 63, 90, 105, 278, 313.
Golden age (Krita yuga) first of four ages, 21, 23, 37, 282, 309, 315.
Government, rules and ideals of, 16, 24.
Gifts, power of, see under Brahmin's cows and gold.
Grass, sacred (Kusha), 22, 68, 112, 124, 141, 186, 195, 202, 305, note 1.
Greeks, see Yavanas, 43.
Guha, king of Nishada, 18, 88, 110, 309.

HANUMAN, son of wind god, 20, 170, 194, 197, 342, note 13.
his leap, 225.
brings Himalaya peak to Ceylon, 262, 266.
goes to Ayodhyā, 275.
leaves, 287.
at horse sacrifice, 312.
to live for ever, 322.
Hari, a name of Vishnu, 282, 293.
Hartal, a, 88.
Heaven, 2, 5, 8, 9, 13, 21, 27, 30, 36, 45, 47, 54, 75, 79, 89, 98, 102, 183, 316, note 19.
voices from, 21, 301, 309.
not open to sonless men, 24.
reward for those dying in battle, 97, 244, 265, 284.
nymphs of, sent to tempt men, 5, 11, 12, 51, 53.
Hell, 8, 30, 36, 73, 79, 84, 102, 122, 235, 316, 336.
its tortures, 339.
Himalayas, 19, 34, 40, 44, 52, 152.
one of them brought to Ceylon, 262, 266
Householder (grihastha) second of four stages of Brahmins' life and generally, 11, 13, 127, 299.
Husband, his wife's god, 14, 75, 79, 85, 94, 95, 292.
under control of wives, 15, 16, 134.
Hymns of praise, 25, 60, 63.
to Sun God, 7, 329.
to Rama, 7, 331.
to Shiva, 340.

IDOLS, 101.
Ikshvaku, son of Manu, ancestor of Solar Race, 23, 45, 51, 181, 278, 296.
guardian deity of race, 287, note 9.
Incarnations, see under Boar, Buddha, Dwarf, Fish, Kalki, Krishna. Man-lion, Parashurama, Rama and Tortoise, all of Vishnu, note 20.
Indra, king of heaven, 4, 12, 13, 19, 26, 47, 51, 54, 58, 68, 76, 103, 113, 125, 137, 138, 145, 164, 198, 205, 210, 227, 253, 273, 296, 323, 342.
steals a horse, 49.
assumes form of a demon, 33.
of a cuckoo, 53.
deceives Vishvamitra, 53.
and others, 139.
seduces Ahalya, 40, 341, note 19.
murders a child in womb, 39.
murders an Asura, 32, 311.
murders a Brahmin, 97.
his horrid penance, 32.
father of a monkey, 28.
comforts Sita, 157.
taken captive, 219, 230, 341.
his heaven, 34, 108, 116, 118.
his fight with Ravana, 341.
Indrajit, son of Ravana, 219, 230, 245, 265.
makes image of Sita, 263.
Immolation, self, 98, 103, 105, 132, 137, 165, 167, 338.

JAHNU, a sage, drinks up Ganges, 36.
Jamadagni, father of Parashurama, 58.
visits Rama, 281.

Jambavan, king of bears, 197, 225.
assists at Rama's coronation, 278,
refused permission to go to heaven, 322.
Janaka, father of Sita, 31, 41, 55, 297.
Jatayu, a vulture friend of Rama, 20, 142, 153, 162, 171, 195, note 3.
Javali, a minister, 57, 312.
his atheistic teaching, 129, note 5.
Jumna river, 91, 191.

KABANDHA, a wonderful demon, 163.
Kaliyuga, fourth age, 224, 241, 295, 307.
Kalki, a future incarnation of Vishnu, note 20.
Kama, God of love, 5, 53, 189.
Kamdhenu, cow of plenty, 42, 102,339.
Kaikeyi, wife of Dasharatha, 9, 19, 28, 64, 73, 83, 89.
death, 317.
Kapila, rishi, founder of Sankhya philosophy, 33, 34.
an incarnation of Vishnu, 340.
Karma, deeds, actions, what we have done in a former life, 8, 11, 69, 74, 84, 86, 89, 90, 95, 159, 183, 185, 282, 296, 306, 338.
Kartikeya, god of war, 41, note 19.
Kashyapa, father of gods and demons, 37, 38, 73, 143.
visits, Rama, 281, 298, 312, 315, notes 3, 4, 9.
Kausalya, mother of Rama, 15, 28, 71, 81, 86, 89, 93.
death, 317.
Kings, become devotees in old age, 75.
wealth and power of, 16, 23, 25, 64, 68, 80, 88.
duties of, 100, 125, 138, 149, 155, 161, 197, 232, 244, 294, 305, 326,
reckoned as gods, 122, 182.
obtain one-sixth of subject's property, 138.
and one-fourth of ascetics' merit, 138.
the first king created by Brahma, 309.
Kinnaras, men with horses' heads, 148, 169, 225.
Koshala, Rama's country, 22, 28, 87, 321, 324.
Krishna, incarnation of Vishnu, 3, 274, 295, 320, note 20.
Rama is, 333.
Krita Yuga, first of four ages, 21, 23, 37, 224, 241, 282, 302, 307, note 10.
Kshatriyas, second of the four castes, warriors, 6, 17, 21, 23, 307, 325.
origin of, 143, note 4.
degraded, 43.
slain by Parashurama, 58.
Kumbhakarna, brother of Ravana, 231, 253, 336.
his boon, 337.
cursed by Brahma, 254.
killed by Rama, 258.
Kusha, twin son of Rama, 23.
born, 305.
sings before Rama, 313.
succeeds his father, 321.
Kuvera, god of riches, 5, 28, 68, 113, 136, 147, 154, 203, 217, 229, 273.
his asceticism, 335, 337.
his garden, 205.
his aeroplane, 203, 230, 335.
one of four world-guardians, 335.

LAKSHMANA, brother of Rama partial incarnation of Vishnu, 3, 6, 8, 9, 20, 29, 55, 72.
defies fate, 74.
goes into exile, 81.
his blunder, 153.
reproves Rama, 161.
wounded, 245, 260.
renounced and goes to heaven, 320.
one-fourth of Vishnu, 321.
Lakshmi, goddess of prosperity (Shri) 38, 184, 202, 241, 274, 283, 286, 301, 322, 333, 340.
Lanka, capital of Ceylon, 147, 154, 193.
invaded by Rama, 238, 335.
its guardian goddess, 201.
Lava, twin son of Rama, 23.
born, 305.
sings before Rama, 313.
succeeds his father, 321.
Linga, the male organ, the phallus the symbol under which Shiva is worshipped, 342.
Loka loka, *world not a world*, 311.
Lotus that sprang from Vishnu's navel, 301.
Luxury, 17, 23, 109, 115, 313, 324.

MAGADHA country, 31.
Magicians, 240, 264.
Mahabharata, epic, 2, 10, quoted 14, 17, 37, 43, 52, 57, 79, 91, 191, 200, 205, 209, 234, 307, 317, 320, 323, notes 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12.
its account of Rama, notes 17, 20.
Maharshis, great rishis, 225, 238, 244, 325.
Mandara mountain, 37, 191, 236, 252.
Mandakarni ascetic, tempted by gods, 12, 140.
Man-lion incarnation of Vishnu, 3, 336, note 20.
Manthara, hunch back, 64.
punished, 106.
Manu, ancestor of solar race, son of the sun, 42, 73, 76, 278, 307, 324, notes 4, 6, 9.

Manu, laws of, quoted, 7, 14, 17, 43, 85, 93, 96, 163, 180, 181, 191, 198, 205, 286, 311, notes 4. 9.
Maricha, demon, 20, 29, 30, 149, deceives Rama, 152.
Markandeya 57, note 5.
his account of Rama, note 17.
Marriage, ideals of, 24, 240.
husbands should be kind and faithful, 57.
choice of own husband practised, 271.
denied, 31, 32, 271.
older brothers marry first, 180.
mixed marriages, 17, 24, 96
Maruts, storm gods, 5, 26, 39, 153, 205, 315, 327.
Matanga made a god, 166, 170, 175
Materialists of ancient India, note 6.
Maya, architect of demons, 195
Maya, *illusion*, Vishnu's spouse, 318, 323.
Medicinal plants, 262, 266.
Merit and demerit, 12, 50, 66, 69, 84, 86, 94, 127, 159, 193.
Meru mountain, home of gods, 166, 233, 252, 283, 311, 335,
Mlechchhas out-castes, foreigners, 43, 192.
Moon-god, 7, 68, 76, 161, 164, 205, 327, 340.
Monkeys, Rama's allies off-spring of gods, 1, 28, 165, 172, 313.
report Sita's rape to Rama, 156.
millions gather to help Rama, 191, 239.
restored to life by Indra, 274,
bid farewell to Rama, 279.
reunited to their celestial fathers, 323
Moral teaching, 9, 11, 12, 13, 24, 32, 41, 49, 51, 53, 60, 69, 73, 161, 178, 181, 183, 189, 208, 209, 222, 229, 236, 241, 256, 263.

NAGAS, snake deities, 148, 193, 210, 218, 315.
Nala, a monkey, builds bridge, 237.
Narada, rishi, 1, 19, 22, 76, 283, 295, 307, 315, 327, 338. note 2.
Narayana, a name of Vishnu, 6, 26, 274, 280, 282, 284, 300, 304, 333.
Nature, love for, 91, 92, 117, 144, 168.
the grief of, 94, 156.
in distress, 219, 267.

OBEDIENCE, filial, 1, 70, 72, 73, 80, 89, 99, 122.
Ocean, churning of, 37, 248.
as a goddess, 198, 235.
OM, the sacred syllable, 7, 274, 282, 312, 322, 333, 340, note 11.
Omens, 25, 27, 57, 59, 62, 86, 94, 100, 145, 159, 163, 172, 211, 212, 231, 242, 245, 257, 265, 290.
Orders, the four, or stages in a man's life, 127.
Out-castes, 43, 46, 166, 192.
Owl and vulture appeal to Rama, 300.

PAHLAVAS, Persians, 43, note 1.
Parashurama, incarnation of Vishnu, 3, 8, 57, 73, note 20.
Peoples, list of, 43, 109, 192.
Phallic, worship, 342, see Linga.
Polygamy, 14, 15, 85, 154, 183.
Prajapati, used for Brahmā, 205, 253.
Prajapatis, lords of creatures, mind-born sons of Brahmā, 143, 209, 236. 238, 253, 315, note 4.
Prayaga (Allahabad), 91.
Prayer, generally, 13, 60, 63, 77, 82. 92, 111, 113, 198, 205, 229, 291, 328,
prayer to Ganges, 6, 90, 327.
to Shiva, 340.
to Jumna, 92.
to Gayatri, 7, 63, 142.
Pulastya, grandfather of Ravana, and son of Brahmā, 209, 253, 281, 315, 335, 339, 342, note 4.
Puranas, 38, 154, 287, 311.
Purda system, see under women.
Purusha, the first male, 74, 274, 311, 333, 334, 340.
Pushkara, sacred lake near Ajmere, 49, 295.
Pushpaka, Ravana's aeroplane, 202, 239, 247
described, 275, 284, 287, 301, 308, 335, 337, 339.

QUALITIES, the three, 286.

RAHU, a demon, 133, 179, 200, note 8, see eclipses.
Rakshasas, a class of demons, q. v. 154, 205, 230, 284, 335.
their origin, 336, note 14.
man becomes a, 164, 297.
receive gifts from Rama, 313.
Rama, incarnation of Vishnu, 1, 13, 14, 15 16, 19, 165, 242, 323, 338, note 20.
equal to one half of Vishnu, 3.
is all the gods, 273, 300, 333.
says he is only a man, 8, 273.
the Supreme Soul, 263.
greatest of gods, 7, 58, 167, 273, 280, 282.
birth, 28.
weds Sita, 57.
chosen ruler, 60.
exiled, 70.

slays demons, 146, 152.
loss of Sita, 158.
anger at the gods, 160.
laments his sins, 159.
reaches Lanka, 238.
wounded, 246, 260.
kills Ravana, 268.
can destroy both gods and demons, 188, 235,
unslayable, 258.
honour to be killed by, 183, 244.
coronation, 278.
repudiates Sita, 272.
repudiates Sita again, 289
kills a Shudra, 308.
his long reign, 279, 317.
ascends to heaven, 322.
devotion to, 310, 323.
celebrates horse sacrifice, 279, 312, 317.
cow sacrifice, 317.
a human hero, note 1.
his ancestry, note 9.
Ramayana, authorship and date, 2, note 1.
verbally inspired, 22.
sacred like the Vedas, 323.
Shudras can listen to it, 21.
benefits from reading, 2, 21, 36, 279, 323.
recited, 306, 313.
Ramayan, of Tulsidas on Rama, note 18.
Rambha, heavenly nymph, 52, 136.
curses Ravana, 340
Ravana, ten-headed demon, 2, 20, 132, 137, 147, 149, 229.
his asceticism, 3, 12, 26, 202, 222, 265, 336.
carries off Sita, 153.
fights, 250, 265.
killed by Rama, 268.
Brahma's boon to, 149, 154, 157, 221, 235, 253, 337.
his wives, 203.
visits White Island, 283.
his earlier history, 282, 335—342.
Revelation (Shruti), see Vedas, 327.
Rig Veda, first of four Vedas, 33, 76, 171, see Vedas.
Ritual, exactness of, necessary, 25, 47.
Rishis, saints or sages, in general, 12, 24, 29, 31, 32, 33, 51, 91, 210, 278, 284.
bad temper of, 34, 36, 319, 335, note 3,
Brahmarshis, 236, 254.
power of, 11, 31, 34, 36, 40, 44, 47, 113, 134, 140. See also under curses.
the seven rishis, 76, 238, 244, 327, note 4,
visit Rama, 281,
as the Great Bear, 229, 281.
as the Prajapatis, 281.
devarshis, 307.
eaten up by Ravana, 338.
Rivers, sacred, 90, 92, 163, 186.
list of, 191.
Rudra, the earlier Shiva, 92, of the three eyes, 221.
Rudras, 143, 153, 193, 315.
the eleven Rudras, 193, note 3.

SACRIFICES, animal, 26, 92, 163. 205, 260, 270.
cow, 92, 317, 341.
Rajasuya, 310, 341.
horse, 5, 13, 24, 33, 279, 310, 317, 341.
human, 49, 50.
power of, 13, 131, 261, 264, 311.
gods sacrifice without Shiva, 4, 55.
use of, to gods, 13.
household, 93.
generally, 240, 242, 296, 338
Sadhyas, personified rites of Vedas, live in middle region, 315, 333.
Sagara, king, 32, 73, 236, note 9
Sama Veda, 105.
Sambhu, name for Shiva, 193.
Sandals, Rama's, 132.
Sanat Kumara, mind-born son of Brahma, 282.
Sankhya philosophy, 34, 311, 334.
Sanskrit and Prakrit, 61, 212, 306.
Sati, see widow-burning.
Savari, an old lady, 166.
Savitri, 79, 134.
Sea of milk, one of the seven seas, 37, 193, 248, 284, 311.
the seven seas, 167, 340.
Shakas, Scythians, 43, 192, note 1.
Shakuntala, 52.
Sharabunga, hermit, 5, 136, 137.
Shatrughna, brother of Rama, one-eighth of Vishnu, birth, 28.
marrige, 57.
kills a demon, 303.
his new kingdom, 303, 305.
a part of Vishnu, 304.
goes to heaven, 322.
Shesha, serpent, 193.
Shiva, third member of Hindu triad, 4, 5, 41, 68, 76, 93, 118, 175, 217, 273, 303, 312, 328.
his blue throat, 37, 303.
his bow, 55.
his dart, 304.
at sacrifice of Deksha, 4, 55, 147.
allows Ganges to fall on his head, 35.
his fight with Vishnu, 58.
of no avai against Brahmins, 44.

his boon to demons, 336.
pleased with Ravana, 338, 341.
words in praise of, 340.
as Rudra, note 3.
Shivi, a king, 67.
Shri, see Lakshmi.
Shukra, priest of demons, 76, 121, 328.
Shudras, the fourth and servile caste, 17, 96, 307, 315, 325.
origin of, 143, note 4.
cannot practice asceticism, 307, 308.
Shunashepha, man sacrifice, 49.
Shurpanaka, demoness, maimed by Rama, 144, 336.
Siddhas, perfected saints, 137, 193, 238, 283, 315, 324, 327, 333, 340.
Sita, wife of Rama, birth, 55.
marriage, 57.
exile, 70.
advises Rama, 139.
carried off, 153, 17.
in Lanka, 156.
found by Hanuman, 205.
laments Rama, 247.
repudiated, 272.
the goddess Lakshmi, 274, 286, 333,
again repudiated, 289.
sons born to, 305.
sent for, 314.
the earth receives her, 316.
her appeal, 331.
in a former life, 338.
Slaves, gift of, 105.
Social conditions, 15, 98, 99, 107, 109, 115, 173, 279, 324, 326.
Soma moon-god, see Moon.
a plant, 25, 327, 328.
Sons, desire for, 104.
save from hell, 128.
Spells, 29, 247.
Stars, pole star, 229.
seven rishis, 229.
future condition as, 241.
Sugriva, kings of Monkeys, 20, 28, 165, 169.
his armies, 19.
fights Ravana, 243.
at Rama's coronation, 278.
at horse-sacrifice, 312.
Suicide, 195, 205.
Sulking room for women, 65.
Sun (Surya) god, 7, 76, 133, 159, 161, 164, 166, 198, 205, 328, 336.
Rama's hymn to, 268 329.
called god of gods, 268, 329, 339.
Rama's ancestor, note 9.
Sura, goddess of liquor, daughter of Varuna, 38.
Svayambhu, self-existent, 198, 201.
applied to Brahma, 221.

TAXATION, kings' right to one-sixth, 138.
Taxila, a city, 318.
Temples, 63, 69, 71, 82, 87, 101, 107, 217, 231.
Texts, sacred, 92, 96, 260.
virtue in repeating, 97, 305, 340.
Time personified, comes for Rama, 318,
fights Ravana, 339.
Tortoise, Vishnu's incarnation as, 37, note 20.
Tradition, Smriti, 327, 328.
Transmigration, 8, 45, 47, 74, 86, 185, 294, 300, 302, 338.
sins of former life punished, 9, 47, 50, 90, 95, 159, 183, 241, 306.
virtues rewarded, 69, 94.
Trees, sacred, 63, 69, 92, 115.
Treta-yuga, second of four ages, 307, 315, note 10.
Tribute, payment of, 108.
Trishanku, king raised to skies, 12, 45, 229, note 9.
Truth, greatness of, 1, 11, 60, 67, 69, 70, 89, 100, 130, 139, 144.
Twice-born, see caste.

UMA, wife of Shiva, 41, 118, 175, 312, 336, notes 4, 19.
Umbrella, white, 62, 120, 186, 190, 203, 207, 252.
Universe, dissolution of, 44, 161, 174, 224, 301, note 5.
Urvasi, a celestial nymph. 297.

VALAKHILYAS, spirits, size of thumb-joint, 148.
Valmiki, author of Ramayana, 1, 2, 22, 92, 290, 305, 313, note 1.
Vamadeva, Dasharatha's minister, note 5.
Vaishya, third caste, 17, 96, 143, 307, 325.
origin of note 4.
Varna, *colour* Sanskrit word for caste, 277, 307.
Varuna, vedic deity, Gr. *Ouranos*, 17, 24, 68, 82, 113, 205, 273, 339.
Vashatkara, an exclamation, 312, 322, 333, note 11.
Vasishtha, rishi, 11, 24, 29, 41, 45, 54, 80, 83, 99, 108, 112, 278, 281, 298, 307, note 5.
His one hundred sons cursed, 46, 161.
curses the Vasus, note 3.
curses a king and is cursed, 296, his re-birth, 297.
Vasuki, serpent king, 38, 194, 230
fight's Ravana, 339.

Vasundhara, earth goddess, 316, 322.
Vasus, vedic deities, 5, 143, 153.
the eight Vasus, 193, note 3.
Vatapi, demon eaten by Agastya, 141.
Vayu, wind god, 5, 19, 159, 170, 197, 205, 223, 342.
curses bent virgins, 31.
Vedas, the three, 171, 286.
the four, 322.
generally, 5, 6, 13, 25, 60. 71, 75, 82, 84, 94, 125, 126, 155, 162, 181, 183, 186, 206, 222, 242, 262, 271, 325, note 16.
Rig, 171.
Yajur, 171, 270.
Sama, 105, 171.
Atharva, 6.
used by demons, 201, 206,217, 219, 222, 231
Vedangas, limbs of Veda, 206, 325, note 16.
Vedic gods, their place in Hinduism, 4, notes 3, 7.
Vibhishan, brother of Ravana, 222, 230.
joins Rama, 230.
made king, 269.
at Rama's coronation, 278.
at horse-sacrifice, 312.
his severe asceticism, 336.
his boon from Brahma, 337.
Viraj, born from the subdivided Brahma, 76, 311.
Virtue, profit and pleasure, 60, 73, 185, 263.
Vishnu, second God of Hindu triad, 2. 3, 5, 6, 19, 27, 30, 33, 92, 138, 142, 147, 165, 190, 221, 242, 274, 280, 311, 316, 318, 336, 338, 339.
is all the gods, 282, 300.
of the thousand eyes, 51.
his bow, 58, 59, 142.
his arrow, 304.
fights with Shiva, 58.
in form of Kapila, 33, 34, see also incarnations.
all things as Vishnu, 323.
death at his hands a boon, 282,
kills a woman, 293.
pervades all things, 282.
the youngest brother of Indra, 286, 336.
three worlds in his belly, 301, 340, note 5.
refuses to fight Ravana, 339, 340.
Vishvadevas, Vedic deities, 92, 93, 315, 327.
Vishvamitra, king, made a Brahman, 4, 5, 11, 38, 46, 54, 189, 278, 281, note 5.
creates new stars, 48.
quarrel with Vasistha, 41.
curses his own sons, 50.
Vishvakarma, architect of gods, 113, 192, 194, 203, 335, 337.
Vyahritis, the three sacred words, 7.

WARRIORS killed in battle got a heaven, 97, 244.
Water, oblation, 123, 163, 186, 196.
Wealth of ancient days, 23, 68, 80.
Weapons, heavenly, 29, 30, 44, 142, 146, 152, 219, 220, 237, 252, 259, 260, 264, 269, 301, 303, 304, 338, 339.
White Island, 283.
Widows, see under women.
Wine, offered to gods, 90, 92.
Women, position of, 14, 272.
must obey husband, 15, 16, 75, 83 122, 134.
husband her only god, 14, 75, 79, 85, 94, 95, 292, 314.
no trust in women, 15, 67, 85, 101, 142, 153.
seclusion of, 14, 82, 173, 188, 271.
freedom of, 100, 189, 326.
praise of, 184, 185, 210.
given away as gifts, 276.
disobedient wives, 99, 134.
husbands should be kind to wives, 57.
devotion to one wife praised, 97.
burning of widows (sati), 15, 99, 153, 184, 338, note 1.
remarriage of widows, 153.
Worlds, the three, 119, 122, 161, 164, 174, 179, 283, 339.
in Vishnu's belly, 301, 340, note 5.

YAKSHAS, kindly spirits, 165, 242, 316.
their origin, 336, 337, note 14.
Yama, god of death, 5, 17, 44, 76, 97 113, 146, 179, 194, 205, 230, 257, 273
his fight with Ravana, 339.
Yavanas, Greeks, 43, 192, note 1.
Yayati, made a god, 161.
curses his son, 297.
ancestor of Rama, note 9.
Yoga philosophy, 13, notes 1, 11.

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